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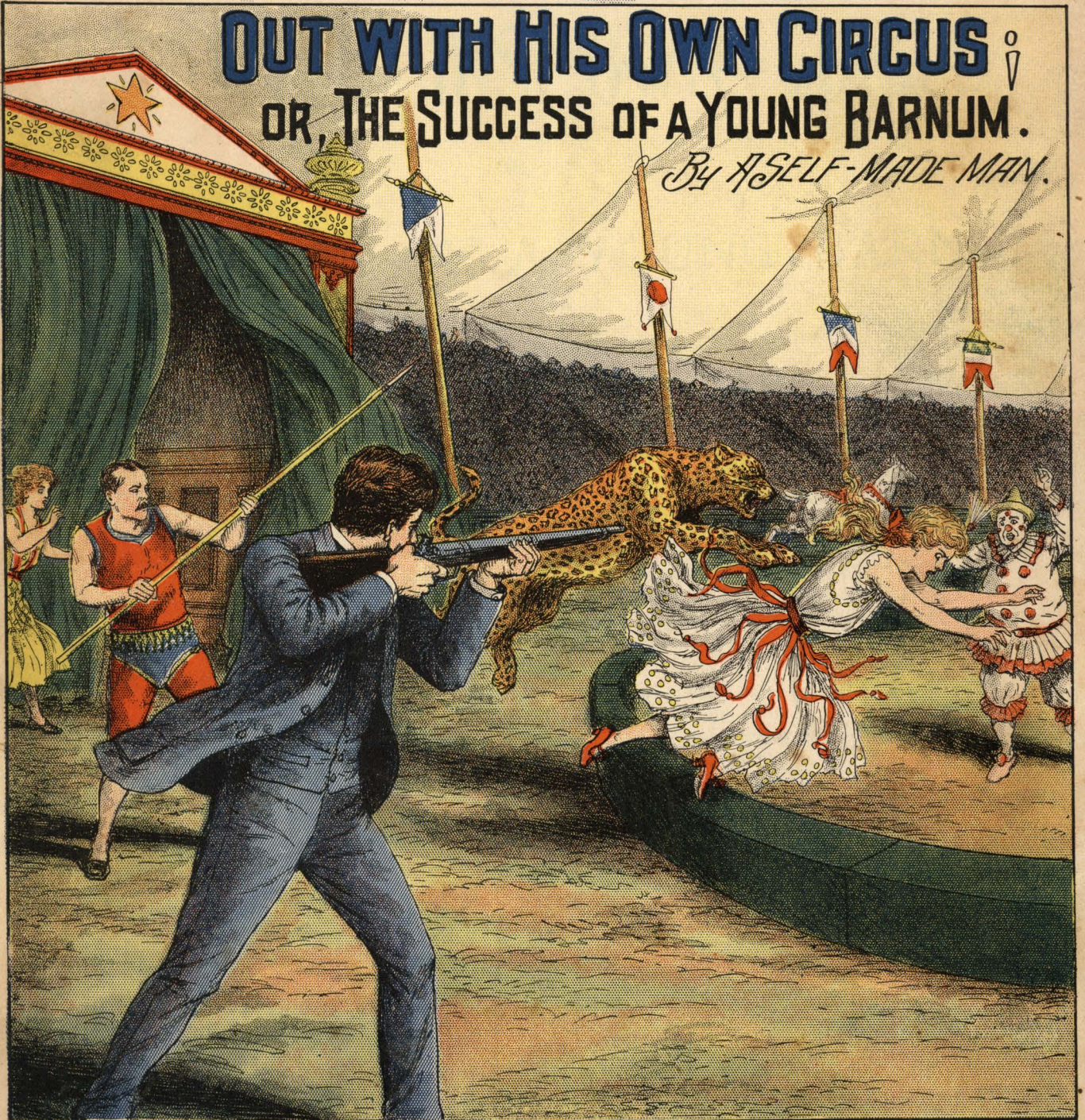
AND

FORTUNE WEEKLY

STORIES OF BOYS WHO MAKE MONEY.

OUT WITH HIS OWN CIRCUS
OR, THE SUCCESS OF A YOUNG BARNUM.

By A SELF-MADE MAN.



With a roar that shook the canvas top the jaguar sprang upon Mdle. Celestine, and instantly the applause of the spectators was changed to cries of horrified surprise. Tom quickly raised his rifle and fired point blank at the beast.

Fame and Fortune Weekly

STORIES OF BOYS WHO MAKE MONEY

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OUT WITH HIS OWN CIRCUS

OR,

THE SUCCESS OF A YOUNG BARNUM

By A SELF-MADE MAN

CHAPTER I.

TOM SMEDLEY

"It's the chance of a lifetime and dirt cheap at the price, which you ought to know, seeing you've been with the show these three years past," said Jack McMasters, the tiger trainer, to Tom Smedley, business manager and treasurer of the Great Oriental and Occidental Circus and Menagerie, a one-ring tent show which was about to leave its winter quarters at Fowlersville and take the road for its sixth season.

"Yes, I know it's the chance of a lifetime, and I also know it's cheap," admitted the handsome and shrewd-looking young fellow who had been the right bower of William Sellus, late proprietor of the show, "but——"

"But what?" interrupted the tiger trainer, impatiently. "The widow can't handle it and is anxious to get it off her hands. You know the show from A to Z, and if anybody can make a barrel of money out of it you can."

"You don't understand the situation, Jack," said Tom. "I'd snap it up in a moment if I had the funds, or if Mrs. Sellus would take my notes for the bulk of the purchase price."

"How do you know that she won't accept your terms? She knows that you are as square and honest as the day is long. You have been treasurer of the show for two years, as well as business manager last season, and Mr. Sellus had full confidence in your ability and integrity."

"That's all right, Jack. Mrs. Sellus might not object to my proposition if it were not for the fact that two men,

with spot cash, have made overtures to her. Both are well-known circus men, though neither has ever owned a circus of his own. Cash down on the nail counts every time. Under those circumstances I don't see where I am in it even a little bit."

"But if either of these men get the show you'll probably be out of a job, and right at the beginning of the tenting season when everybody has been engaged."

"I don't see how I can help that. The new proprietor will not be obliged to recognize any of the late Mr. Sellus's contracts. It is probable, however, that he will take all the people who have been engaged. At any rate, you are sure of going out with the show, for your royal Bengal tiger, Rajah, is one of the features that can hardly be duplicated at this time."

"I sha'n't feel at home unless you're with us, Tom, and nothing would please me better than to take my hat off to you as the main guy," said Jack McMasters, heartily.

"Thank you, Jack, I know you mean that."

"Well, if I were you I'd see Mrs. Sellus and make an offer to her. She can't more than turn you down. If I had any money I'd lend it to you to help you along."

"I am sure you would, Jack. Well, I'll call on her and see what I can do."

The foregoing conversation had taken place at the door of a large frame building in an enclosed field where the property, live and otherwise, of the circus was housed during the winter on the outskirts of the small town of Fowlersville.

For weeks past painters had been at work repainting and gilding the gaudy-looking chariots, the bandwagon, and

other vehicles that took part in the daily parade before the afternoon show when the season was on.

The Great Oriental and Occidental Circus, although billed as the greatest aggregation of novelties on earth, was in reality a third-rate wagon show.

Its route always took in the smaller towns and big villages that never saw the big three-ring modern circus, and its yearly reappearance was always looked forward to with just as much excitement and anticipation by the small boy and his larger prototype as was the case with the patrons of the bigger circuses.

The present show had toured the country for five consecutive seasons under the proprietorship and personal management of William Sellus, an old circus man, who had grown gray in the sawdust business.

He was preparing to inaugurate his sixth season, with an added array of attractions, according to the new bills in the printer's hands, when he suddenly dropped dead one morning from heart disease, leaving his show, and everything connected therewith, in the hands of his widow.

As soon as the news of his death was printed in the big theatrical weekly of New York City, several would-be circus proprietors began to lay wires looking to the purchase of the Sellus show from the widow.

That lady, however, being much prostrated over her husband's death, was not in any shape to consider what she was going to do about the future of the show.

All business matters were turned over to Tom Smedley, the smart young business manager and treasurer, who had been Mr. Sellus's right-hand man during the preceding season, after a previous experience of two years in the executive department of the circus.

Tom was nineteen, an expert ticket seller, an accurate bookkeeper, honest and reliable as the day was long, cool and resourceful in emergencies, polite and considerate under all circumstances, and a prime favorite with everybody connected with the show from the "main squeeze," as the proprietor was called, down to the humblest employee.

From the moment that Mr. Sellus breathed his last Tom took charge of everything in the widow's interest.

He supervised the funeral arrangements, and the widow leaned on his arm at the grave while all that was mortal of the showman was consigned to its last resting-place.

Tom said as little as possible to Mrs. Sellus about circus matters until the tenting season was almost on, and it became absolutely necessary to consult her about the immediate future of the show, which was now ready to take the road as soon as the performers reported for duty, which would be just as soon as the "call" was issued.

Then, somewhat to Tom's surprise, she announced her intention of selling the show outright just as it stood.

She had answered the letters of two circus men who wanted to purchase, and they were coming on to look the property over and make her an offer.

She asked Tom if he could give her an idea of what the show was worth, and he told her, naming a fair figure.

"I don't suppose I'll get what it's worth," she told the boy.

"No; these men will try to take every advantage of you," replied Tom. "I will look out for your interests, however, and see that you are not cheated."

"These men have written that they have the money to

buy it out and out," said Mrs. Sellus. "I am willing to take one-third less than your estimate of its value to get rid of it clean and clear for ready money. I want to leave this town and return to my people in the East."

That was the way matters stood when Tom had his talk with the tiger trainer as recorded at the opening of this chapter.

The price the widow was willing to accept in spot cash was, as Jack McMasters had remarked, "dirt cheap," and Tom, who knew just what profit the show was likely to earn that season, wished he had the money with which to buy it.

He was confident that he could run the enterprise successfully, and had been anticipating doing so in Mrs. Sellus's interests up to the moment she had announced her positive intention of getting rid of it for good and all.

He was much disappointed to find that the opportunity of running the show was about to pass away from him just when it seemed to be within his grasp.

When he parted from Jack McMasters he started for the residence of the widow with the intention of making her an offer of \$1,000 cash down, which was the bulk of the money he had managed to save since he joined the show, and the balance in annual payments, secured by a mortgage on the property.

He had little hope that she would accept such an offer in face of the cash that the two circus men professed to have at their fingers' ends.

In fact, his proposition looked so ridiculous the more he thought it over that when he reached Mrs. Sellus's home he did not enter at the gate but kept on down the shady street toward the river.

"She'd think I was crazy to make such an offer, and probably she'd be right. I would need several thousand dollars to get the outfit under way to Centerport, where our route begins, and where would I pick that up? I haven't any good angel to loan it to me. Jack meant well when he advised me to get hold of the show, but he knew mighty little about the financial end of a circus. Why, if Mrs. Sellus let me in on my own terms I couldn't take the aggregation out of town. No, I'm out of it, and I might as well understand that first as last."

It was seldom that Tom was otherwise than bright and cheerful, but just now he felt a bit down in the mouth.

Whoever bought the show might keep him on the payroll or he might not.

Every showman prefers to instal his own friends in the business department, and though Tom's familiarity with the Great Oriental and Occidental Circus was a good recommendation, it did not follow that it would enable him to hold his job.

It was a bad time for him to catch on with another circus, as their rosters were filled long before, still, if he failed with a circus he could probably secure a position with some theatrical company.

At any rate he did not fear about his own future under any circumstances.

CHAPTER II.

TOM SAVES LITTLE EVA CHASE.

As Tom was approaching a secluded part of the river bank his thoughts were interrupted in a sudden and start-

ling way by a shrill scream from the direction of the water.

"Hello! What's that?" he exclaimed. "Someone in trouble?"

Such was evidently the case from the succession of screams that followed.

Tom immediately ran toward the bank of the river.

As soon as he got a clear view of the stream he saw an overturned sailboat floating along with the current, which was quite rapid, a little girl clinging desperately to the end of the boom, and a boy two years her senior swimming as hard as he could for the bank.

Tom didn't stop to consider how the catastrophe had happened.

He saw that the girl was in great peril of her life, and as the boy appeared to be a good swimmer he could not understand how he seemed to be deserting her.

"What are you swimming ashore for, young fellow? Why don't you save that girl?"

The boy made no answer, but reached for a rock and climbed up on it.

"Don't you know that boat is drifting down to the rapids?" said Tom.

"I can't help it," replied the boy, sulkily.

"The girl will drown."

"What can I do?"

"What can you do? You can swim back and save her."

"No, I can't. I had all I could do to save myself."

"You're a little cur and coward," cried Tom, in a tone of angry disgust. "You could save her if you wanted to. You're a good swimmer. Stay where you are, then. I will save her if I can."

Tom at once started down the bank to reach a point a little ahead of the boat.

As soon as he accomplished his object he threw off his jacket, kicked off his shoes, and after shouting to the girl to hold on for her life, he dove into the river and struck out for the boat.

The little girl tried to maintain her hold, but when Tom was half-way to her the boat hit one of the rocks in the stream a glancing blow and the shock disengaged the child's grip.

She uttered a frightened scream and sank below the surface.

Tom aimed for the spot where she went down, but she came up some little distance ahead, screamed, threw up her arms and sank again.

Tom redoubled his efforts to reach her, for her life depended on his being able to save her before she went under the third time.

Her little brown head came up a yard away from him.

He could see that she was still conscious from the feeble way in which she beat the surface of the water.

Tom seized her as the water was closing over her face.

He raised her head out of the water, and sustained her limp and exhausted body by one arm while with the other he struck out for the shore.

The rapid flow of the stream was carrying him and his burden faster down with it than he could make headway against it.

To make matters worse the rapids were only a short distance ahead.

Once caught in that dangerous stretch of navigation he knew he would have a hard time in extricating himself and the little girl from the sharp rocks and whirlpools abounding there.

Tom was a good swimmer, but was placed at a great disadvantage because he was only able to use one arm.

He did his best, however, and as he swam ahead the little girl recovered her senses fully and fixed her big, round, hazel eyes on his face.

She seemed to feel a confidence in the strong arm that encircled her and held her up, for she did not struggle at all, which was fortunate for them both.

It was a desperately hard swim he had, and it grew more difficult every moment as they neared the broken water below.

Finally he managed to reach a bit of slackwater near the bank and he took advantage of it to make a last vigorous effort to reach shore.

In a few minutes his feet struck bottom, and catching the child in his arms he staggered up on the bank.

Then nature asserted itself and he sank down utterly exhausted on the ground.

The girl clung to him as he lay there until he was able to sit up, and then he disengaged her arms from about his neck.

"How do you feel, little one?" he asked her.

"I feel wet and tired. You are awful good and brave to save me. Papa will pay you a lot of money when you take me home."

"Pay me! No, I don't think he'll pay me anything."

"Yes, he will. My papa is rich."

"I don't care how rich he is, I wouldn't take a cent for saving your life."

"Why not?" she exclaimed, opening her round eyes in surprise. "Don't you want money? Are you as rich as my papa?"

"No, I'm not rich, and I wish I had a wad of money, but I wouldn't take a cent from him for saving your life."

The little girl didn't seem to understand what Tom meant.

His words were a puzzle to her.

He wasn't rich, he wanted a lot of money, and yet he wouldn't take it from her father, who could easily afford to give him plenty.

"What is your name and where do you live?" asked Tom, as they sat on the bank while he recovered his strength.

"Eva Chase. I live in a big house near where the boat upset," she replied. "What is your name and where do you live?" she added.

"My name is Tom Smedley, and I live up at the circus buildings."

"Do you belong to the circus?"

"I do."

"Do you act in the ring?" she asked, with fresh interest in her rescuer.

"Oh, no. I'm business manager and treasurer."

"What's that?"

"I look after things and take charge of the money."

"Do you sell tickets in the wagon?"

"No. I used to do that."

"I like the circus," she said. "So does my papa."

"Well, I think we will go along now. I'll take you to

your home right away. We must walk fast. Who was that boy I saw swimming from the boat after she upset? Was he with you in the craft?"

"Yes. That is Ralph Atkins. It was his boat and he took me for a sail."

"He's a contemptible little coward, for he's a good swimmer and ought to have tried to save you. It was his duty to do that, and he could have done it much easier than me at that distance from the rapids. It's lucky for you I was near by at the time or you would have been drowned."

"I sha'n't speak to him any more. He ought to have saved me because papa put me in his care, and told him to be very careful of me. He promised that he would, but when the boat upset he didn't try to save me at all, but swam away without paying any attention to me, though I begged him to help me. When I saw him swim away I was awfully frightened, and I screamed as hard as I could."

"I heard you. You screamed first when the boat went over, didn't you?"

"Yes. I couldn't help it, for I thought I was going to be drowned."

Tom started on a jog trot so as to warm the girl up a little and keep her from getting chilled from her damp garments.

When he reached the place where he had left his jacket and shoes he put them on.

A short distance ahead he saw young Atkins looking at them and evidently waiting for them to come up.

Tom and little Miss Chase turned off and took the river road.

The boy, observing this, proceeded to intercept them.

He appeared to be about fifteen years of age, was well dressed, and his face wore a haughty, supercilious look, as though he thought a whole lot of himself, and looked down on the average run of humanity.

"Hold on, there!" he shouted in a commanding way.

Neither Tom nor Eva paid any attention to him.

Their indifference to his request made him angry.

He hurried up and grabbed Tom by the sleeve of his jacket.

"Where are you taking Eva Chase?" he demanded, authoritatively.

"Home," replied Tom laconically, shaking off his grip.

"I'll see her home myself," said Atkins, running around to the other side and taking Eva by the arm.

She stopped and hung back.

"I don't want anything more to do with you, Ralph Atkins," she said, in a tone that showed she meant what she said.

"Why not?" exclaimed Ralph in surprise.

"Because you're a coward, and left me to drown. I would have been dead now if this boy hadn't saved me. I don't want you to come to my house any more. I don't mean to speak to you any more. My father will be very angry with you when I tell him how you acted."

CHAPTER III.

TOM'S GREAT LUCK.

A short distance further on Tom saw through the trees the white wings of a handsome villa, and recognized it as the residence of a wealthy retired banker of Fowlersville.

"Is that where you live, Miss Eva?" he asked her.

"Yes," she replied.

They hurried up to the gate and as they entered the grounds a little black-and-tan dog, which had been lying on the piazza with his nose in his paws, sprang up and came dashing down the gravel walk, barking shrilly.

He appeared to regard Tom with some displeasure while he frisked about his mistress, springing up at her hands.

"Now, Toby, do be quiet," she said to him. "Can't you see that I'm all wet?"

Whether Toby recognized that fact or not, he didn't seem to care.

The front door was open, and when they mounted the three wide steps to the piazza Eva pulled Tom toward it.

"I guess I'd better leave you now, Miss Eva," said Tom, holding back.

"No, no; you must see my papa," she insisted.

"I can see him some other time," replied the boy. "I'm wet and mussed up. It won't do for me to come in."

"You must come in and have your clothes dried. You must. I won't let you go."

Her insistent tones brought a fine-looking gentleman to the door.

This was Eva's father, Curtis Chase.

One glance at his little daughter's wet and bedraggled appearance and he uttered a cry of consternation.

"Why, Eva, my darling, did you fall in the river?" he cried, grabbing her in his arms.

"Yes, papa. The boat upset, and this boy, Tom Smedley, saved me from being drowned."

"Good heavens! My precious one. You must go right to bed and have something warm to drink right away."

"Yes, papa; but don't let Tom go away. He saved my life and you must thank him."

"Wait a moment, young man," said the banker.

He rushed the little girl inside, and Tom could hear him shouting for Miss Page, who was Eva's governess and companion.

He was gone perhaps five minutes, and then he came back.

"You are wet yourself, young man. You have been in the river, too, for Eva said you saved her life. Come right up to my room and take off your clothes. I'll have them dried at once in the laundry."

"I don't think I ought to give you so much trouble, sir," protested Tom.

"Trouble! Don't mention it. I'm under everlasting obligations to you for the service you have rendered my only child. Believe me, I will never forget what I owe you, and I shall certainly insist on making you a substantial return."

He grabbed Tom's hand, shook it warmly, and fairly dragged him into the house, and up the front stairs into his own apartments.

"Now disrobe. I'll let you have some of my clothes to put on while your own are drying."

Tom made no further objection, but proceeded to undress.

"What is your name, and where do you live?" asked the banker while he was thus engaged, as he brought a suit of undergarments from one of his bureau drawers.

Tom told him.

"Are you connected with Sellus's circus?"

"Yes, sir. I'm treasurer and business manager."

"Indeed! Quite a responsible position for so young a man as yourself."

Tom admitted that it was, but said he had proved able to fill the bill.

Tom put on the garments laid out for him by the retired banker, while Mr. Chase rang for a servant to remove the boy's damp clothes, and have them dried and pressed out in the laundry as soon as possible.

Mr. Chase then excused himself a few minutes, as he was anxious to see how his daughter was getting on.

"Now, Mr. Smedley," said the banker, when he returned, "how can I be of service to you? I want to do something for you to show my heartfelt appreciation of your gallant conduct in plunging into the river and saving my child's life."

"I don't want you to do anything for me, sir. I am fully repaid by knowing that I saved your daughter."

"You are too modest, my dear boy. Can't you think of some way that I can help you along in this world?"

"Well, sir, there is only one way you could help me, but I wouldn't think of suggesting such a thing."

"Why not?"

"It is too much of a favor."

"It is impossible that you can ask any favor at all within the shadow of reason that I would not grant if it lay in my power," replied the banker earnestly. "You can't fail to understand that you have placed me under the deepest of obligations to you. My child's life is of more importance to me than all my other earthly possessions combined. Under those circumstances I shall not rest satisfied until I have done something for you in return."

Tom's heart thrilled as he listened to the banker's words.

Could he muster up the nerve to ask this grateful gentleman to finance him to the extent of purchasing the show and putting it on the road?

It was a mighty delicate matter, and he naturally hesitated.

Mr. Chase saw that he had something to propose and yet from modest motives held back, so he encouraged him to speak out, assuring him that whatever project he had in view would meet with his earnest consideration.

"The fact of the matter is, Mr. Chase, I am now face to face with the chance of my life, but unfortunately my hands are tied for lack of money."

"What is this chance, if I may be permitted to inquire?"

"I will tell you. I have the opportunity to buy out the Oriental and Occidental Circus and Menagerie at a comparative bargain for cash."

"Mrs. Sellus wants to sell out, then?"

"She does. She's going to quit this town and go East to live near her people. I had some intention of making her a time offer on the show, but unfortunately there are two circus men in the field against me, and they have the cash to pay down. Money talks every time, as you no doubt know from experience, so there isn't the ghost of a chance for me as the case stands. I may also say that if either of these men buy out the circus it is quite likely that I may lose my position, as they will no doubt have a friend to put in my place."

"How much money will it require to buy the circus as it stands?"

Tom named the sum, which, though an undoubted bar-

gain, was a pretty stiff figure as measured by dollars and cents.

"It sounds large, sir, but it is really cheap for the property and goodwill. According to all indications this will be a good year for tent shows. We ought to take in," here Tom mentioned a large sum, "in admissions alone. Then our privileges have already been let for," Tom mentioned another sum in round numbers.

"What do those privileges consist of?" asked Mr. Chase, clearly much interested.

"The concert after the main show; the side show, consisting of various freaks, in a small top outside the big top; the——"

"I beg your pardon for interrupting you, but will you explain what you mean by small top and big top?"

"Certainly, sir. Circus people always call the canvas covering or tent by the name of top."

"Then a small top means a small tent, and a large top——"

"Is the main tent where the show is given in one or more rings, according to the size and importance of the circus. It also covers the menagerie wagons, which are anchored behind a section of the seats."

"I see," replied the banker. "Pray go on."

"In addition to the concert and side show there is the candy, popcorn, peanut and lemonade privileges, usually rented to one man or firm, who has stands both inside the top and outside in the lot, and employs boys, as a rule, to go about hawking his wares among the spectators. The persons who run these privileges are called butchers."

"Butchers! An odd name for such a trade," laughed Mr. Chase.

"Our profession is full of such curious titles. There is the 'snack stand,' for instance, which is an improvised structure, on the lot and elsewhere, where our people can get a hasty bite after the show, and in the morning before entering the place where the day's show is to take place. You would probably call it a free-lunch counter. Circus dialect for a man is always 'guy,' and the proprietor of the show is always called the 'main guy,' or 'main squeeze.' A trunk is known as a 'keester' and a valise is a 'turkey.' 'Lid' signifies a hat, and a ticket is always called a 'fake.' An elephant in circus language is never anything but a 'bull.' The posters and lithographs sent out in advance are 'paper,' and the programmes and other literature are distinguished as 'soft stuff.' Side show orators are called 'spielers' and 'blowers,' and the employee who has charge of the naphtha torches, which are 'beacons' in the circus world, is known as the 'chandelier man.' I could mention many other titles equally odd to your ears, though perfectly understandable to the circus man, but I think those I have alluded to cover the ground."

"Let us get back to the subject. You have mentioned the receipts in a general way, how about the expenses during a season?"

"Our entire expense account last season, including wages to performers and all employees, amounted in round numbers to," and Tom mentioned the amount. "The net profit of last season was," here Tom stated a fat sum. "It ought to be considerably greater this season from the outlook. If I could borrow the purchase price of the show, together with, say, \$5,000 to take the outfit on to Centerport, and

allow me a leeway against unforeseen expenses, at five per cent. interest, the whole to be secured by a first mortgage on the entire property of the circus, including the buildings on our leased lot, I'd guarantee to be able to pay it back within two seasons."

"You think that you are thoroughly capable of running a big wagon show, Mr. Smedley?" said the banker.

"I am sure of it. I am certain that if Mrs. Sellus cared to continue the business this season she would have put me in charge of the show. As a matter of fact, I consider her resolution to sell, especially at the low price she is willing to accept, as an evidence of poor business judgment. I tried to talk her out of it, as I believed it to be my duty to do, in her interest, but no argument I used had the least effect on her. She was resolved to get out of the business, and that was all there was to it."

"You say there are two circus men who are after the show?"

"Yes, sir."

"Are they in town?"

"I am expecting to see one or both of them at any hour."

"You are of the opinion that the price Mrs. Sellus asks is a bargain?"

"Yes, sir, it is."

"Very well. You have shown me a way by which I can in a manner repay you for my child's life which, next to Heaven, I owe to you. As soon as your clothes are fit to put on I will go around with you to see Mrs. Sellus. If she is still of the same mind I will buy her out and then transfer the title to you."

"Do you really mean that, Mr. Chase?" asked Tom, hardly believing the evidence of his ears.

"I do."

"Then you will do me the greatest favor I could ask—you are laying the foundation of a fortune for me," said Tom, gratefully.

"I am delighted to know it. I trust your anticipations will be fully realized."

"I feel certain of it. You will, of course, have your lawyer draw up the necessary mortgage papers so as to secure your loan?"

"Nothing of the kind, Mr. Smedley. I am going to make you a present of the circus."

"No, sir, I cannot accept it that way. It would not be fair, in my opinion, to take such a valuable present from you. But more particularly I wish to owe as much of my success in life to my own efforts as possible. I am confident that I can pay for the show within three years at the outside, though I believe I can do it in two seasons. All I ask of you is to give me the chance to do that. I will answer for the rest. I am an orphan, dependent on my own efforts for success. I am resolved to be a self-made man. You would deprive me of that satisfaction by insisting on giving me the show. It is my purpose to earn it through your kindness and generosity."

"Very well, Mr. Smedley, it shall be as you say. I will loan you the money and take a five-year mortgage, which you will have the privilege of canceling at any time. I shall watch your progress to fame and fortune with the greatest pleasure. I believe you have the grit and the ability that spells success, and I respect your resolution to pay your own way ahead as independently as possible."

They continued to converse on the subject until a servant brought Tom's garments upstairs thoroughly dry and pressed ready for him to put on.

Before he and Mr. Chase left the house Tom was taken to Eva's room at her earnest request.

She put her arms around his neck and kissed him, telling him how grateful she was to him for saving her life, whereupon Tom returned the kiss and told her that he was awfully glad to have been of service to her.

CHAPTER IV.

TOM BUYS THE GREAT ORIENTAL AND OCCIDENTAL CIRCUS.

Tom and Mr. Chase went straight to the residence of Mrs. Sellus and were admitted to the sitting-room where the widow of the circus man presently joined them.

"Mrs. Sellus, this is Mr. Curtis Chase, formerly president of the Fowlersville National Bank."

The lady bowed and Mr. Chase expressed the pleasure he felt at making her acquaintance.

Tom then mentioned the object of their visit.

He said that he had come to buy the show, and that Mr. Chase was prepared to advance the purchase price for him and take a mortgage as security for the loan.

Mrs. Sellus seemed to be surprised and at the same time she looked pleased.

"I should be glad to have you take the property and make a success of it, Tom," she said. "If you had that idea in your mind why didn't you mention it to me yesterday when you were here?"

"Because I didn't see any chance of raising the price yesterday, Mrs. Sellus. In fact, it is only within the last two hours that circumstances put the opportunity in my hands. Now I am in a position to talk business with you."

"I am sorry that you didn't say something about it yesterday, or even this morning," she said.

"What difference does that make as long as I am ready now to buy the show?" asked the boy wonderingly. "Do you wish me to understand that you have changed your mind about selling?"

"Oh, no," she answered. "But you see I received a call about an hour ago from one of the parties who wrote me about his intention of coming on here to look the property over with a view of buying it. His name is Ogden Skinner, and he and another man have just gone to the lot to inspect the property."

"That's too bad," replied Tom, looking very much disappointed. "Did you give him an option on it?"

"No, I wouldn't do any business with him without first consulting you."

"Then I still have a chance to get the show?" said Tom, looking much relieved.

"Yes; but it would have been ever so much better had I known that you were interested in purchasing the property yourself. I think my late husband would have preferred you as his successor. I know he had every confidence in you."

"I did my best while in his employ to deserve his good opinion, Mrs. Sellus."

"I am sure you did, and if I had not made up my mind to dispose of the show I should certainly have you to run it for me."

"So I told Mr. Chase at his house," said Tom.

"Well, as matters now stand I cannot accept your offer until I have given Mr. Skinner an opportunity to make a bid. That is only fair to him, since he has come here from New York for that purpose."

"That's right, Mrs. Sellus. All I can ask of you is to give me the chance to offset his proposition with a better one, if I can afford to do it."

"I am willing to give you the refusal of it on that condition. I will tell him when he calls that I have another offer."

"Thank you, Mrs. Sellus."

"If Mr. Smedley makes you a better offer than this Mr. Skinner, I will stand by him," said Mr. Chase, as he and Tom arose to go.

Mrs. Sellus bowed and her two visitors took their departure.

"I will go over to the lot now," said Tom, "and see this Mr. Skinner and find out what he thinks of the show. I will call and see you later about this matter."

The banker nodded and they separated.

When Tom reached the winter quarters of the circus, he found Mr. Skinner and his friend looking over the wagons and other paraphernalia of the show, as well as sizing up the buildings, in company with the superintendent of the grounds.

Tom was introduced to him, and Mr. Skinner had a whole lot of questions to ask him about business matters connected with the show.

In the course of their conversation the young business manager learned that Mr. Skinner was not prepared to put up more than a third of the cash on his bid.

He proposed to give his notes secured by mortgage for the balance.

Tom was glad to learn this, and he intimated that he did not think Mrs. Sellus would dispose of the show on those terms.

"Why not?" demanded Skinner, sharply.

"Because she wants all cash," replied Tom.

"She'll never get it," he said, with the air of a man who spoke from conviction. "I shall make her a good offer. She had better take it, unless she has other people on the string, for the season is on top of us, and she'll either have to sell quick or send out the show at her own risk. You are booked to open at Centerport on the twentieth of next month, so every day counts now."

"She has another prospective purchaser who is prepared to pay all cash."

"Who is he?" asked Skinner quickly.

"That is a question I am not at liberty to answer."

"Has he made an offer?"

"Only in a general way."

"He has not made a specific proposition in dollars and cents, then?" said Skinner, looking hard at Tom.

"He has not; but in making your bid for this property you must bear in mind that the party in question may go you one better, in which case——"

"I should be out of it, eh?" replied Skinner, with an unpleasant smile. "Has he gone over the ground already?"

"He is familiar with all that is necessary for him to know in order to arrive at a correct idea what the show is worth to him."

"Hum! Just so," answered Mr. Skinner, looking thoughtful.

The circus man had nothing further to say to Tom, but walked off and joined his friend, with whom he entered into a conversation, and they went over their notes together.

Later on Ogden Skinner called on Mrs. Sellus and submitted his bid for the property, which was higher than he had originally intended, as well as the terms on which he wished to purchase it.

Mrs. Sellus told him that she could not entertain any terms other than cash in full for the show.

He tried to persuade her to reconsider her determination, going to the extent of raising the ante by several thousand dollars, but met with no encouragement.

As he could not pay even half cash, he left the town much disgruntled over his failure to secure the circus.

Next morning the second applicant appeared, went over the property and made his offer on a cash basis.

Mrs. Sellus said she would consider his proposition and send him her answer to the hotel where he was stopping.

Then she despatched a messenger for Tom.

On his arrival she told him about the second offer she had received, which was a cash one.

Tom offered her \$5,000 advance on it.

Thereupon she notified the circus man that his offer was declined.

He called upon her and offered \$10,000 more than his original bid.

She declined to accept it, saying that she had practically closed with another party on better terms.

When Tom learned that she had refused a bid of \$5,000 more than his own in his favor he raised his offer to that figure, that she might lose nothing through her inclination to benefit him, and the papers were signed transferring all her right and title in the show to him, receiving Mr. Chase's check in payment in full.

Next day Tom gave Mr. Chase his note for three years for the money he had advanced, and signed a mortgage covering the whole of the circus property as security for the payment of said note.

A notice was then posted up in the main building on the lot to the effect that Tom Smedley was now sole proprietor and director of the Great Oriental and Occidental Circus and Menagerie, which would take the road within two weeks.

CHAPTER V.

MOLLY STARK.

All through the winter a number of women had been busy on new uniforms and trappings for man, woman and beast.

There was rich plush and gold bullion galore in the little workshop on the second floor of the main building.

The pretty spangles that were to glitter in the ring were sewed in place.

The one elephant, which was a feature of the show, was provided with a new jacket of royal purple and gold; while the pair of camels were fitted out afresh for the parade.

These gorgeous fittings are more or less expensive, but the circus management calculates that they must be renewed every year.

Circus day, or the beginning of the tenting season on the road, to the men who have a fortune invested, it will be seen, means the culmination of long and careful and systematic preparation.

Of course in the case of a one-ring old-fashioned show of the Oriental and Occidental type, the expense account and the advance preparations were very much reduced as compared with the up-to-date three-ring modern circus, such as makes its bow in the Madison Square Garden, New York City, every spring.

Tom Smedley didn't have any too much time in which to complete his final preparations to take the road.

While the tour really began at Centerport, on the river, twenty miles away, on Monday, April 20th, an afternoon and evening performance was to be given at Fowlersville on Saturday, the 18th.

This was according to Mr. Sellus's custom, and was something in the nature of a dress rehearsal, though it was always given without a hitch, and was really in no wise different from any of the subsequent performances.

Tom, as soon as he became the actual head of the organization, sent out his "call" for the performers and other people engaged for the season to report on a certain date at Fowlersville.

It was necessary for the professionals to have a week in which to rehearse or perfect their new acts, and for the whole show to be put together.

On Saturday morning, April 4th, the advertising corps started in to bill Fowlersville and the neighboring country, and when they had finished, the big wagon, containing a week's supply of posters and lithographs, went on toward Centerport, with two small teams trailing on behind.

In the case of the Great Oriental and Occidental Circus two weeks' advance work ahead was considered sufficient to attract general attention to the coming show.

With larger shows, traveling by rail, and covering a far wider area of territory, thirty days is about the usual time allowed for each day's exhibition.

Tom had the advantage of a particularly astute and experienced advertising man, who also filled the position of press agent.

His name was Billings.

He was particularly resourceful of schemes and plots, and he left no stone unturned, or chance overlooked, to gain an advantage.

Billboards, barns, fences, trees, and all other available space was bought up by this individual, either for cash or in return for tickets to the performance.

While one big circus of national reputation has been known to use in a season upward of seventy kinds of posters, varying in size from one to sixty sheets, and let loose on the public twelve publications, from a four-sheet to a twenty-page courier, Tom's "paper" was much more modest in its proportions.

What it lacked in variety was made up in brilliancy of colors and wording.

One had only to read the posters and advertising matter produced by the fertile brain of Billings to understand the weird and wonderful possibilities of the English language.

Tom always maintained that Billings was better known in the profession than Shakespeare, although Shakespeare never did much for circuses.

The advance matter that Billings sent abroad for the benefit of the Great Oriental and Occidental Circus was a wonder in itself.

He was admittedly a corking press agent, and more than one big show had tried to entice him away from the late Mr. Sellus, but for reasons of his own Billings was true to his old boss, and he likewise assured Tom that as long as he was treated well he never would secede.

Between the date that the first paper was posted in Fowlersville and the Saturday afternoon when the first performance was to be given in that town, Tom had his hands full of business.

The chief ticket seller of the previous season, a post formerly filled by Tom himself, was advanced to the dignity of treasurer, and he was provided with an expert accountant to help him out.

Tom found himself provided by the late circus proprietor with a fine array of circus talent.

Among these was the star of the previous season, Miss Molly Stark, described on the bills as Mademoiselle Celestine, from the Cirque Imperiale, Paris, and elsewhere.

She was an accomplished and daring bareback rider, who did all kinds of stunts in a line rarely attempted by women, who generally confine themselves to wide pads strapped on their horse's back.

She was a handsome, graceful girl, of about seventeen years, who had been trained by her father.

She and Tom had become uncommonly friendly during the previous season, and what Tom wouldn't do for her was hardly worth mentioning.

What she would have been willing to do for Tom was a secret known only to herself.

She and her father, who was a widower, were among the first arrivals at Fowlersville.

They brought their own trained horses, three animals, with them, and the first morning after their advent in town they had the animals out in the lot behind the main building putting them through a few paces.

Molly had expected to see Tom at the station the afternoon before to meet her, as she had written him when she and her father were coming on, and she was greatly disappointed, and perhaps a little piqued, to find that he did not show up.

But there was a reason, as she soon found out.

Not until she and her father reached the lot next morning about eleven did either of them know that Tom Smedley was the new "main squeeze" of the show.

It was a great surprise to them, as they had supposed the circus was going out under the proprietorship of Mrs. Sellus, but with a general manager to represent her.

Molly was not sure whether she was pleased or not.

Perhaps the real reason of this was that she saw in this change a gulf opening between her and the boy for whom she secretly felt something more than a warm friendship.

As proprietor of the show Tom could hardly be expected to treat her in the same old intimate way as he had been accustomed to do.

He was now her boss and she almost resented their altered relationship.

So when Tom, pleased to death at the chance of greeting her once more, seized a few minutes from his multitudinous duties to come out into the lot to tell her how glad he was

to see her again after several months of separation, though they had corresponded with unfailing regularity up to the moment he became head of the show, she received him with a coolness that surprised and hurt him.

"What's the matter, Molly?" he said, with a look in his eyes that almost conquered her newly formed resolution to be henceforth only his friend in a professional way. "I thought you would be glad to see me."

"Why, of course I'm glad to see you, Mr. Smedley," she replied with a light laugh which was clearly forced.

"You have a strange way of showing it, then," he said in a troubled tone. "Your last letter gave me no suspicion that—that—well, no matter. You scarcely touched my hand when I offered it to you, and now instead of Tom you call me Mr. Smedley."

"I could not think of addressing you as Tom, now that you are the owner of this show," she replied almost coldly, though there was a wistful light in her eyes which belied the tone of her voice.

"I suppose on the same principle I ought to call you Miss Stark," he answered. "The jump I have made from business manager to proprietor of the show hasn't changed my feelings toward you, at any rate, however it may have changed your attitude toward me. To me you are the same Molly, even if—if I have ceased to interest you."

He gave her one longing look and turned away.

She stretched out one of her hands toward him, and the familiar name of Tom was on her lips, when her father came up and greeted the new head of the show.

Then, with a tear in her eye and a quiver to her lip, she walked her horse away.

CHAPTER VI.

OUT WITH HIS OWN CIRCUS.

Fowlersville always turned out en masse to give the Great Oriental and Occidental Circus and Menagerie a grand send-off.

This season was no exception to the rule, and the way that the money flowed in at the window of the ticket wagon for both the afternoon and evening performances made Tom feel that things had begun to come his way.

And yet he wasn't thoroughly happy.

Molly Stark was no longer the same Molly, and that fact almost broke him up.

He hungered for the old free-and-easy intercourse they two had enjoyed the past season, but a wall seemed to have grown up between them, and when they met they exchanged merely a bow and perhaps a few polite words.

After Saturday night's show all the paraphernalia of the circus was loaded on the respective wagons, and then everything was in readiness for the start at midnight on Sunday.

The gilded chariots were hidden under their time-worn traveling canvas covers, and the lot presented the appearance of an army subsistence train ready to depart for the front.

The performers, who had rested all Sunday at their boarding-houses, presented themselves at the lot about ten o'clock and were stowed away aboard the vans devoted to their transportation.

The canvasmen and other employees got aboard the vans

allotted to them, and last of all the drivers of the numerous vehicles mounted to their places, and the signal to start being given, the long train filed out of the lot and took the road for a season which would last about seven months, winding up in the South, where the performers, and all workmen not actually needed for the return trip to winter quarters, would be dropped.

Mr. Sellus always traveled with the show in a comfortable van, especially built for his own use, and this van was now, as a matter of course, appropriated by Tom.

Although Tom was now in a position to travel in comfort and style, to which he had heretofore been a stranger, and for which he had often envied the dead circus proprietor, he soon realized the truth of the old saying: "Uneasy lies the head that wears a crown."

In other words, the risks and responsibilities he was face to face with would have made a bed of roses feel hard indeed.

His van led the long procession on the road toward Centerport, and while others slept he lay wide awake on his soft couch.

The night was chilly and the sky overcast.

The latter fact troubled him not a little, for if it rained hard next day it was bound to make a whole lot of difference in his receipts, though the show would hold forth anyway, rain or shine.

The rain would dim the glories of the pageant as it entered Centerport early in the forenoon, but the parade would take place just the same, notwithstanding the inconvenience it would entail upon the employees and performers.

A circus always keeps its dates, be the circumstances what they may.

But the prospect of rain was only one of the many anxieties that the sense of proprietorship of a big enterprise brought to Tom.

The honor and prospect of large pecuniary reward as the owner of a traveling show was overshadowed at this early stage of the game by the thousand-and-one perplexing problems that no one can understand except he who is up against them.

Tom remembered how he had grumbled at the hardships of travel in the days when his mind was comparatively care-free.

He now realized that physical troubles are as nothing compared with mental ones.

Anxious as he was about the welfare of his new enterprise, one thing worried him more than all his other troubles, and that was the break between himself and Molly Stark.

If it had been a bit of scrap between them he would have had hopes of being able to patch the difficulty up in a day or two.

But the matter was far more serious than that.

He was the owner of the show and she now his salaried employee.

The plane on which they used to meet on terms of equality had diverged, and it looked as if time would only serve to increase the distance between them.

They were friendly, it is true, but the intimacy he craved no longer existed.

Their changed circumstances prevented it to a large extent, but the girl's attitude on the day of her first appear-

ance at the lot was really responsible for the completeness of it.

Five hours of lumbering travel brought the circus train to a point on the road about a mile outside of the suburbs of Centerport, and there it came to a rest.

Tom had fallen asleep about two o'clock, and he was still sleeping when the driver of his van signaled the driver behind him and reined in.

The signal passed down the line, and each vehicle in turn drew up alongside of the hedge.

There was no sign of rain in the sky now.

The clouds had passed away with their threatened moisture and a fine day was in prospect, which was a good omen for Tom and his show.

It was only a little after five, and the sun was not yet up.

The drivers covered their animals with blankets and then curled themselves up on their seats for a brief rest.

The elephant, looking dingy and sleepy-eyed, stood with hanging trunk in his tracks, as if the world held no pleasures for him at that moment.

The other animals connected with the menagerie were closed up in their cages, probably asleep, or resting in their own way.

All the life, animation and brightness of the circus, as the general public sees it, was wanting, but had it been a dark and rainy morning the sight would have been a dreary one indeed.

Thus an hour passed, morning broke and the sun peeped bright and rosy above the distant landscape.

Then the ringing notes of a small bugle wrought an instantaneous change.

The drivers tumbled off their perches and started to feed, water and groom their horses.

The workmen's vans disgorged their human freight, who first hurried to a neighboring rivulet to lave their faces, and then got busy with their various duties.

The snack stand was soon erected, and the cook started to prepare a huge vessel of coffee over a portable coal-oil stove.

While that was under way he proceeded to provide several piles of sandwiches made with tongue, ham, chicken and hard-boiled eggs.

The chariots were soon divested of their canvas coverings, and began to glisten in the rays of the early morning sun.

The road was presently littered with gaudy trappings, flags, and general decorations for the parade.

Men were hurrying to and fro, executing orders given in stentorian tones.

A farmer, driving a load of truck to market, passed slowly down the line on the opposite side of the road, gazing with interest and awe upon the caravan which was to blossom out into a gorgeous show as soon as it took up its march into town.

Some of the men performers now appeared and hurried to the rivulet to perform a hasty kind of toilet before proceeding to the snack stand for a bite.

It was nearly seven o'clock when Tom emerged from his van and took a survey of the weather first of all.

He noted with satisfaction that the day would be a fine one, and he anticipated a large attendance at both afternoon and evening shows.

He walked down the long line of horses, vans and char-

lots, and gave sundry instructions here and there as he proceeded.

On his way back he ordered his horse to be saddled, and while this was being done an employee brought a plate of sandwiches and a cup of steaming hot coffee to his van.

After disposing of the food he mounted his animal, with a diagram of the route to be followed by the parade, as outlined and sent back by the advance man, who proceeded the circus by a few days, and whose business it was to follow up and round out the work of Billings, the press agent and advertising manager.

This astute individual verified the list of advertising privileges, provided for the insertion of newspaper advertisements, and in fine attended to the multitudinous duties of a general advance man.

Tom rode back along the line once more as far as the van containing the women performers.

Apparently he was on a second tour of inspection, but in reality his object was to catch a glimpse of Molly Stark, and, if possible, exchange a word or two with her.

In this he was not successful, and after riding a bit further down the line, he turned and galloped off toward town.

His purpose was to go over the route of the parade and familiarize himself with its conditions.

It was possible that his foresight might suggest changes in the line of march.

A street that might have been in good shape when the advance man went over it might now be turned up in some part for furthering municipal improvement; or perhaps the advance man did not appreciate that at a certain point the parade might double on itself.

As Tom was to lead the parade in person it behooved him to make sure in advance that everything would pass off without a hitch.

In the present case he found no difficulties to be overcome, and he returned to the caravan to find everything in readiness for the start.

After a final inspection, during which he rode up beside Molly Stark, who was attired in a spangled dress of fluffy material, reaching to her knees, and mounted on her black mare Nellie, and paused long enough to press her shapely hand and say good-morning with his heart in his eyes, he gave the signal to start.

The gorgeously decorated band-wagon, drawn by six ponies in shining harness and waving plumes, and carrying its load of gaudily dressed musicians, led off the line, directly behind Tom himself.

Then followed a cavalcade of mounted Roman riders, jockeys, vestals, and acrobats.

After them the one elephant in his purple and gold jacket, with a howdah fastened on his back, in which were seated two of the female performers in Hindoo costume.

Behind the elephant came the two camels, each led by a workman disguised as an Arab, and sandwiched between them an ostrich harnessed to a light gilt wagon driven by a young girl professional.

After them several knights armed cap-a-pie, and then the cage containing the royal Bengal tiger Rajah, with his keeper and trainer, Jack McMasters, reclining negligently on his back.

Then followed the three Roman chariots that figured in

the final whirlwind act of the show, each driven by the man who appeared in the race.

Succeeding them followed the cages of the menagerie, the whole winding up with a steam calliope.

The wagons containing the tents, seats, and everything else connected with the material part of the show, had long before gone on to the lot, which on their arrival became a bee-hive of industry, for everything had to be ship-shape by the time the parade reached the field.

The blaring music from the band-wagon, almost surrounded by a cloud of small boys, who, gorged with happiness, kept pace with it, announced the approach of the procession into town, and soon the streets along the line of march became densely crowded with young and old of both sexes, all eager to see the cavalcade that many of them had been dreaming about ever since the bills appeared on every available space in that neighborhood.

The inevitable hay wagon was in the column, and nimble acrobats, attired in real farm-hand costume, tossed lightly on its soft burden.

Many of the spectators imagined that the wagon had got mixed up in the show by accident and couldn't get free, which was the idea meant to be conveyed.

The clown of the show accompanied the parade as an independent attraction in a dilapidated wagon behind a weird-looking horse.

His countryman disguise was so perfect that his identity was not suspected.

He was always in the way, impeding the smooth progress of the parade.

He became involved in all kinds of plights, once narrowly escaping being run down by a big circus wagon, but emerged unscathed.

Occasionally a policeman along the route threatened him, and once he was actually arrested; but when he explained who he was the crowd roared at the bluecoat's expense.

And so the Great Oriental and Occidental Circus and Menagerie made its triumphant entry into Centerport, and the prospect that it would perform to overflowing business in the afternoon and evening could hardly be questioned.

At any rate, Tom saw a heavy box full of greenbacks in the perspective, and his spirits rose as the procession passed along the streets and finally made its way to the lot, followed by a considerable crowd whose time appeared to be their own.

CHAPTER VII.

A TERRIBLE MOMENT.

Order came out of confusion at the lot when the parade broke up there.

Everything was in readiness for the performances, seats and stands and rings and trapezes in place, and every man at his post.

The cages were dragged into the menagerie addition to the big tent, the horses were led to their canvas stalls, the elephant being pressed into the duty of pushing the red and gilt vehicles into place.

Down dropped the side wall, ropes were set, and the preparation was complete.

The crowd that had followed the procession filled the enclosure in front.

A barker proceeded to take immediate advantage of their presence by appearing on a platform in front of the side-show tent and proclaiming with fluency and skill and oratorical effect the wonders of the exhibition within.

A row of pictorial banners added weight to his discourse.

The side-show was run on sharing terms with Tom by this man, who provided the curiosities, consisting of a wild man from Borneo, a human lamp, a Circassian beauty, a midget, a living skeleton, a fat woman, a gypsy fortune-teller, and an expert knife-thrower with his small curly-headed boy assistant.

The crowd listened in open mouth wonder to the barker's harangue, gazed at the pictures, especially the one representing the capture of the savage in the wilds of Borneo, and finally at one of the freaks called to the platform for a moment's survey.

As an irresistible attraction the wild man's dinner—a raw hunk of beef, impaled on a slender iron rod and brandished aloft—was exhibited.

The crowd hesitated no longer, but made a rush for the ticket booth, and was soon filling the side-show tent, at a uniform admission fee of ten cents.

During the first two seasons of the Great Oriental and Occidental Show Manager Sellus sent his people to a hotel for their regular meals, of which they had two—one about noon and the other at five, but there were too much delay and unsatisfactory provisions in this plan and the circus felt their injurious effects.

Accordingly the proprietor added the "cook tent" to his outfit the previous season, and fed his people on the lot.

The advance man saw that all the needs of the commissary department were provided for, and so when the circus arrived at the lot in Centerport, meat, vegetables, water, and other requirements awaited the hands of the cook.

Dinner was ready at noon, and the eating-tent was soon filled with the hungry performers, and such other employees as were not engaged at the time.

There were two long tables—the performers sat around one, and the executive staff, and others above the grade of workmen, occupied the other.

Tom himself sat at the head of the second one.

Outside, the advance guard of the public were hanging about the entrance to the big tent, or were being entertained in the side-show.

About the time that dinner was over the first of the big crowd expected that sunshiny afternoon began to arrive, and from that time on up to the beginning of the performance at half-past one, the spectators appeared in gradually increasing throngs.

The trolley cars running out of Centerport passed right by the lot, and though the company pressed all its extra rolling stock into service, they were not sufficient to meet the emergency, so that hundreds were obliged to walk to the show.

And they did it, too, without a kick, for the Great Oriental and Occidental Circus was a popular institution in Centerport.

The vacant spaces in the lot began to fill up with every imaginable kind of a conveyance from the farms and small villages within a radius of fifteen miles about.

These were left hitched to the long fence at one side until the show was over.

Tom had his hands full in front as the crowd began to gather.

The ticket wagon was soon surrounded with a growing crowd clamoring for the sale to begin; but although the treasurer and his assistant were inside waiting for the signal to open up, Tom took his own time about giving it, notwithstanding the impatience of the mob.

There was an advantage to the management by no undue haste in distributing the tickets, and this was the harvest reaped by the side-show.

Finally Tom gave the signal to his treasurer, and the moment the window of the wagon was opened the crowd pressed up closer, the two men inside facing a sea of upturned, distorted, perspiring faces, though the day was cool, while aloft the air was full of hands brandishing admission money.

The jam around that wagon was simply great, and the crowd momentarily grew bigger.

"We'll have a corking crowd to-day," muttered Tom to himself. "It looks as if there won't be a seat to spare, and that we'll have to turn many away for the evening show. I hope this is a specimen of the luck I'll be up against all season. If it is there will be a fine balance in my favor at the end of the tour."

The rates of admission—fifty cents for adults and half-price for children from two years and a half to ten, those under the former being admitted free—were conspicuously posted.

Wonderful and varied were the devices resorted to in order to secure half-rate admission for children considerably over ten, and many parents insisted that robust kids of five and six were entitled to free entrance.

To the main entrance came the swarm of written orders for tickets issued by Billings, and afterwards by the advance agent, to pay for advertising privileges.

As a precautionary measure against imposition Tom sent a number of his employees out during the time of the parade with lists of those places where lithos and bills should be found posted up.

If the circus advertisement had been removed, or hidden, or disfigured, a note was made of the fact, and thus at the time of the opening of the doors Tom held in his hand a complete list of those who were and who were not entitled to recognition, and strict justice was dealt out to any delinquent when he appeared with his order, much to his chagrin and disappointment.

At no stage of the proceedings was Tom asleep.

He knew his business from the ground floor up, and while he was polite in dealing with the public he was firm in resisting unfair demands.

Half an hour before the performance was to begin the big tent seemed to be crowded, but many hundreds more found seats in the enclosure.

Finally Tom reluctantly sent word to his treasurer to stop the sale, as all the seats were occupied.

There were a hundred or more people around the wagon, or making for it, when the window was closed, and they were turned away, to their great disappointment; but it couldn't be helped, there was no room for them in the big tent.

Vigilant canvasmens picketed the stretches of cloth, alert

lest the small boy, or his older relative, crawl under the fabric and gain free admission.

So watchful were these men, and so obdurate against pleading juvenile persuasion, that surreptitious entrance was pretty effectually barred.

Exactly at half-past one o'clock the band, from its elevated perch in the tent, started up the music for the "grand entree" of all the performers on horseback, and the afternoon show was on.

The star act of the performance was Molly Stark's bareback riding, during which she dove through paper-covered hoops and turned somersaults over banners, besides executing various other hair-raising feats on the back of Nellie, her coal-black steed.

The people had seen her the previous season, but she had a new act this time that aroused the audience to a fever-heat of enthusiasm.

While she was in the ring Jack McMasters, who was to follow, had the cage containing his trained Bengal tiger taken from its position in the menagerie and brought close to the performers' entrance.

He was all ready to put the beast through his paces before the admiring throng, and while awaiting his turn was talking to one of the trapeze artists a short distance away.

Rajah, the tiger, was not in his best mood that afternoon.

Something had gone wrong with him, and he was pacing his cage in a sullen way, as if longing to be back in his native wilds, where he would not be obliged to show his intelligence twice a day, but would have a holiday all year round.

Tom Smedley was standing just outside the red curtains that veiled the entrance to the dressing-rooms, watching Molly go through her act.

She was such a daring performer that he always felt nervous when she was on.

The men who held the hoops and banners had instructions to watch her at every stage of the act, and be ready to catch her if they could in case she gave any indication of taking a tumble.

An exhibition of marksmanship was to follow the performance of McMasters and his tiger.

The sharpshooter was all ready, and had been watching Molly Stark from behind the curtain near where Tom stood.

Somebody, however, called him away and he stood his rifle up against the side of the entrance.

As Molly successfully finished her act with a whirlwind dash around the ring the rifle slipped from the wall, fell outward and struck against Tom's leg.

He stooped and picked it up.

Just then the girl sprang lightly from the horse and began bowing to the spectators, who shook the tent with their tumultuous applause.

At that moment shouts of alarm were heard behind the curtain.

Tom turned to go behind, but as he did so he saw the striped form of the Bengal tiger creeping through the curtain.

For a moment his heart stood still, for he realized the desperate exigency of the moment.

Rajah had in some way escaped from his cage, which stood a few yards away, and unless he was instantly headed

off from the audience, and recaptured, no one could say what might not happen.

The fate of the circus even hung in the balance, for if the animal got among the crowd a terrible panic was certain to result with the most deplorable results, even if the beast did not kill or maim any one himself.

Rajah paused an instant, while his sullen and baleful eyes glanced at the young proprietor of the show.

Then, lashing the tanbark with his mighty tail, he glared straight at the ring and the lithe form of Molly Stark.

With a roar that shook the canvas top the tiger sprang upon "M'lle Celestine," and instantly the applause of the spectators was changed to cries of horrified surprise.

Tom quickly raised the rifle and fired point-blank at the beast.

CHAPTER VIII.

WHAT TOM SAID TO MOLLY AND WHAT SHE SAID TO HIM.

Molly realized her peril and that there seemed to be no escape from a terrible death.

Her terrified scream mingled with the sharp report of the rifle.

The tiger was in the air when Tom fired, and the ball went as true as a die against the most vulnerable part of his shoulder-blade.

With a screech and roar the animal fell short of his aim, striking the earth at the very feet of the terrified girl, and then rolling over and tearing up the earth and tanbark with his claws.

McMasters was on him in a moment with the whip that the beast knew and feared.

As the blows fell in a shower upon the tiger, and several performers rushed up with weapons to assist in the subjugation of the animal, Tom dashed forward and caught the pale and tottering circus rider in his arms.

He rushed her through the curtain and into the women's dressing-room, where he turned her over to the woman in charge of the place.

Then he rushed back to the arena, for every moment counted now.

The audience was in a state bordering on panic, which might even have already started but for the prompt action taken by the ring-master, clown and other attaches, who from different points of the ring assured the spectators that the danger was all over.

Tom hastened to add his voice and assurance to the others, walking around the circle of seats and allaying the excitement.

Several women had fainted, others were in hysterics, and still others on the verge of it, while children were crying here and there.

The vigorous efforts of Tom and his assistants succeeded in quieting the people who watched the quick subjugation of the tiger with bated breath.

The animal was covered with a strong netting, provided for just such an emergency, which prevented him from doing any damage to either his trainer or the employees, and in that state he was dragged out by a horse and returned to his cage, the strong door of which had got open in an inexplicable manner, and thus given the beast his liberty.

Of course the tiger act was omitted, and was cut out of the evening performance as well, for Rajah, while not seriously injured, was badly crippled for the time being, nevertheless.

The band, after playing through the excitement, stopped, and then the leader gave the music cue for the marksmanship act, which consisted of all kinds of stunts at sharpshooting, and finally the shooting of a small apple off a boy's head while the marksman stood with his back toward the lad and took aim with the aid of a small looking-glass.

The thrill that went through the audience at this ticklish feat was increased by the band, which had been playing right along, stopping suddenly as the man started to take aim at the apple.

A death-like hush fell upon the spectators, many of whom turned away their heads, while a goodly part of the women folk caught their breath and turned pale.

It seemed like an age, and you could have almost heard a pin drop, before the marksman pulled the trigger.

There was a sharp report, and the apple went spinning in fragments from the boy's head.

So great was the people's relief at the successful result of the shooting that a tremendous burst of applause shook the canvas enclosure, and it was kept up while the man and his nervy young assistant bowed their way out of the arena.

While that act was going on, Molly was in a half hysterical condition in the women's dressing-room.

The shock she had sustained was too much for her strong nerves, and she had wilted like a rag.

But one thing she knew—Tom Smedley had saved her life, and had carried her from the ring to the dressing-room in his strong arms.

As soon as she partially recovered her composure she asked to see him and he was sent for.

Of course he came at once, his heart in a flutter of delight at the thought that he had saved her life and thus secured a claim on her consideration, which he had feared was lost to him forever.

She met him just outside the door of the dressing-room, and holding out her hand said:

"I am very grateful to you, Mr. Smedley, for saving my life."

"And I am more happy than you can think because I was in a position to save your life, Molly. Won't you drop Mr. Smedley, except in public, and call me Tom, as you did in your letters, and last season with the show?" he asked earnestly.

"Do you really wish me to?" she asked, looking down.

"Do I? If you knew all that I wish with reference to yourself you would not ask me that question."

A warm blush spread over the girl's face and neck.

"If you knew how badly I have felt at your seeming coldness since that morning we met in the lot you would perhaps have a little pity on me," he added.

"I did not mean to—to—" she began, and then stopped.

"Well, no matter. Let us begin over again, and be the same old friends we were. Will you?"

"Yes, if you want to," she answered.

"I do want to," he replied eagerly. "Don't you?"

"Yes," she said, raising her eyes shyly to his face. "But can we?"

"Why not? What's to prevent us?"

"We are on a different footing now than what we were last season. Then you were an employee like myself; now you are my employer and I am your——"

"Only in a business sense," he interrupted. "As the proprietor of this show it is true that policy would prevent me from showing you any special attention before the others; but privately, between our two selves, we stand on the same footing as we did last season. To me you are always Molly; shall I continue to be Tom to you?"

"Yes."

"You have made me very happy once more. More happy than you can guess. I have found it a more difficult and harassing matter to run this show than I dreamed of when I took it in hand. It is a constant source of anxiety to me, for there are a thousand and one things that call for my earnest attention all the time. Yet worrisome as these things are, they were as nothing compared to the distress I felt at the loss of your comradeship. A grateful man of means, whose little daughter's life I saved from drowning in the river a short time ago, showed his appreciation of the service by buying this show from Mrs. Sellus for me, giving me my own time to repay the purchase price. This is the chance of my life, and I ought to make a fortune out of it; but if I had to choose between a fortune and your friendship, Molly, I'd throw everything to the winds for your sake. There, now you have some idea of my feelings toward you. Had that tiger killed you, as he probably would have done, but that Forrester providentially left his rifle standing within my reach, I think I should have thrown up everything, walked down to the river and put an end to my life."

"Oh, Tom, you do not mean that," she said, laying one of her hands on his arm, while her breast heaved and her eyes glistened.

"I do, Molly," he said solemnly. "I care more for you than anything in this world. Do you care a little for me in return?"

"I care for you with all my heart. Are you satisfied?"

"Satisfied! I was never more so in my life."

He drew her behind one of the three Roman chariots used in the last act of the show that filled a part of the space between the two dressing-rooms, and pressing her unresisting form in his arms kissed her lips till she hid her blushing and happy face on his shoulder.

Then he let her go in time to run against her father, who was looking for him, anxious to thank him for having saved his daughter's life.

"Don't mention it, old man," he said to Joe Stark, who was still an equestrian of no mean ability, and did a clever act with two horses. "Thank Heaven rather than me, for if Forrester hadn't left his rifle within my reach, no power on earth could have saved Molly from Rajah."

The grateful father believed him, but gave him all the credit for his presence of mind and quickness, just the same.

CHAPTER IX.

A HINT OF FOUL PLAY.

During the rest of the show, which went off without a slip, Tom felt like a bird.

Molly loved him, and had given him undoubted evidence

of the fact, and he was so happy that he felt like whooping things up.

His face showed the ecstatic state of his feelings, but everybody ascribed it to the successful commencement of the tour, for the audience that afternoon was a record one, and another as big was confidently expected to fill the tent that evening.

The side-show, too, had done a land-office business, and the evening was still to be heard from.

As soon as the show was over and the last of the crowd had left the lot, supper was ready in the eating-tent, and all hands, with the exception of the workmen, who had already eaten, gathered around the tables and ate their evening meal with a hearty appetite.

After supper the people had two hours for rest and recreation, and they employed the time in various ways as suited their fancy.

This, however, did not apply to the hard-worked people of the side-show, who were nearly always on duty from the time the crowd first hovered around in the morning until after the main performance was over at night.

While the women performers were busy with fancy work or sewing, and the men were talking over the gossip of the ring, Jack McMasters called Tom aside to say something to him that he considered of considerable importance.

"I examined the door of Rajah's cage very carefully to try and discover how it was that the beast managed to force it open," said Jack.

"Well, what did you find out?" asked Tom.

"I found that the lock had been tampered with."

"Tampered with!" exclaimed Tom, in surprise.

"Yes, tampered with," replied Jack. "You ought to know that I am too careful with Rajah to leave anything to chance. I have never failed yet during a tour to examine every part of the cage at least once a day, and the door I inspect several times to make sure that the fastening is in its usual condition. Before the cage was moved from the menagerie enclosure I looked the lock over and saw that it was all right. How it could have come open of itself, or through any effort on the part of the tiger, was a mystery to me. But before Rajah was returned to it I made an investigation, and the result of this inspection assured me that the door had been tampered with."

"Who could have tampered with it, and for what purpose?" asked Tom, with a serious expression.

"That is what puzzles me. It must have been done by an expert under circumstances that would almost insure his detection."

"Have you made a searching inquiry among the people whose duties brought them within reaching distance of the cage?"

"I have. I've been looking into the matter ever since the affair occurred. I wanted to try and get some light on the thing before I reported the mysterious side of the case to you."

"And you have found no clue to the person who, in your opinion, let the tiger out?"

"Not the least bit of a clue."

"If your suspicions are well founded, as I am bound to believe they are, this is a very serious matter. The circus has evidently an enemy, either on the outside or in the

person of one of the employees. I will have to look into the matter very seriously."

"I think the circumstances warrant it, Tom—I beg your pardon, Mr. Smedley."

"Never mind the mister when we're together, Jack. I don't want you to put a handle to my name except before others. We are old friends, and I hope will always remain so. I haven't taken on a swelled head because I have risen to the head of this show."

"I'm glad to know that, Tom, for I like you, and would be glad to remain on the old footing with you."

"Well, Jack, as to this tiger matter, I shall consider it a great favor if you will keep your eyes and ears open hereafter all the time. The rascal, whoever he is, if an employee of this show, may thus be detected. It was a dastardly act to let that beast loose on the public, for that is what it would have amounted to had not Molly Stark attracted his eye at the start-off. I am sorry I was compelled to shoot the beast, but I had no other course. He is the most valuable animal with the show, and had I put him out of business for good it would have done away with your act for the season, which would have been hard on you, though I would have taken care to make it all right with you in some way."

"You did the right thing, Tom. It was a providential circumstance that Forrester left his rifle where you got at it without the loss of a moment."

"It was a chance in a thousand. Clearly the Power that guides all our actions in this world arranged things so that Molly was to be saved. Had the girl been killed—well, we won't talk about that. It didn't happen, and I am truly thankful."

"I can understand your feelings, Tom. You like the girl a whole lot, I guess. At any rate, it looked that way last season, when you were treasurer and business manager."

"I do like her, Tom. I don't mind admitting the fact to you. I care for her more than I do for my own life. Some day I intend to marry her. That's a secret, though, which you must keep to yourself."

"Sure, I'll never whisper a word about it. She's a fine girl, and an artiste to her finger tips. I've heard one of the big shows made her a fine offer for this season after her father closed with us last November, but that she turned it down, preferring to go out with Sellus again."

"Yes, she wrote me about it at the time the offer was made."

"Well, I'll keep my eyes skinned, Tom. If I should discover the man who fixed that door so Rajah could get out I'll make things so hot for him that he'll think twice before he attempts any more tricks like it," said Jack, with a shake of his head that meant no good for the offender.

"He deserves to be handled without gloves. If he is found out I shall certainly have him arrested and put through for the act," replied Tom. "A panic was narrowly averted. You know what such a thing as that would mean to the circus."

"It would put the show in a bad hole."

"I should say that it would."

Tom and the tiger trainer then separated, the young circus proprietor going out in front.

Twilight hovered about the lot, and quite a crowd of the early birds had arrived for the evening performance, which would not begin for more than an hour yet.

Most of them were congregated near the side-show, where the barker was ready to receive them and, if possible, part them from their dimes.

The chandelier man was fixing the naphtha torches in their places, and the cool evening breeze from the distant river caused them to flutter and glow in the air.

Inside the "big top" the big circle of seats were as yet barren of spectators, but after the tent was lighted the wife of Dan O'Conner, the clown, took possession of the ring to rehearse her act, which hadn't gone off that afternoon to her satisfaction, while her husband acted as ring-master.

One of a family of gymnasts was up in the dome of the canvas examining the fastenings of the trapeze apparatus to make sure that it was all right for the evening's performance.

At length there came the shrill notes of a whistle, the performers scampered to the dressing-rooms, the ushers appeared and soon afterward the evening audience began pouring into their seats.

Outside the first preparations for the departure from town were under way.

The cook and eating-tents, blacksmith, barber and other small tents spread about the lot dropped to the earth, were quickly folded up and stowed away on their wagon.

A short time after the performance began the ropes and stakes holding in position the marquee at the front entrance and the menagerie extension to the main tent were loosened, and the doorkeeper moved back to the open fly in the big tent, called the back door.

The cages were closed, horses hitched, side walls lowered, and the vehicles passed out into the night, followed by the lumbering elephant, in his night attire.

In a short time nothing remained of the encampment but the noisy "big top," glowing like a mammoth mushroom, and the side-show canvas, where the small band of four musicians discoursed rag-time, while the barker still roared with tireless energy to attract the loiterers in the vicinity who were watching the breaking up of the circus.

The work of stripping the larger tent proceeded during the performance.

As fast as a performer finished his act his appliance was deftly carried to a waiting wagon.

At last the show was over and the audience poured into the main arteries of the town.

The side-show orator received the outgoing throng with renewed clamoring.

To take this last advantage and let no chance of profit escape, that tent had been kept open.

The freaks were tired and yawning with the monotony of it all, and eagerly awaited their last call to the front.

In the big top the "concert" was going on before a small proportion of the spectators who had taken in the main show.

It didn't amount to a whole lot, and ten cents covered the price of a seat.

As the majority of the seats were unoccupied workmen were taking them to pieces while the concert went on.

Tom's private van carried a good-sized safe, in which the money had already been locked up, and the driver, a trusted man, stood at the door with a loaded revolver in his coat pocket until the boss of the show appeared to take possession.

The ticket wagon had long since disappeared from its position in front of the big tent and had taken its allotted position among the other wagons of the caravan.

The snack stand was open down near the wagon train, and was the last thing to be loaded up when the moment of departure came.

At length the concert and side-show were both done, and the two tents, the big one and the small ditto, were taken down.

The denuded center poles followed to the ground, and where a few hours before was a white encampment, was now a dark, bare area, rutted with wheels, trodden by many feet, and littered with peanut shells and sawdust.

Already the wagon train was in motion, with a red lamp at the rear of each vehicle to denote its position to the driver of the one behind, and the Great Oriental and Occidental Circus and Menagerie was on its way to its next day's stand, after having made a goodly harvest of shekels at Centerport.

CHAPTER X.

HOW THE ELEPHANT SAVED THE CIRCUS.

That night, during the long ride to Chestertown, Tom slept like a top.

His mind was comparatively at peace.

The show had begun with satisfactory prospects, but more than that even, he had made up with Molly and extracted from her a confession of her regard for him.

The hundred and one smaller problems that always were before him were dwarfed into insignificance by those two important facts.

The only thing that worried him at all was whether he had a traitor in the camp.

If he had, no stone must be left unturned to bring the rascal to light.

He hoped that Jack McMasters had been mistaken in his surmise of crooked work, and that to accident alone was due the escape of Rajah; but just the same he was not going to take any chances if he could help himself.

The circus made its entry into Chestertown in the same manner it had done at Centerport, and attracted just as much notice and excitement.

The day was equally fine, and Tom was in high feather over the prospects of a big crowd at this town, too.

He had seen Molly for a few minutes before the parade started, and her shy and tender smile assured him that all was serene in that quarter.

She was looking fine and feeling very happy, for her dreams had been filled with visions of the handsome circus proprietor whom she knew loved her with all his heart.

Still she could not repress an occasional shudder as she thought of the narrow escape from death she had had from Rajah, but the unpleasant fact was softened by the knowledge that she had been saved by the boy of her heart, and that circumstance made her feel more than ever in love with him.

Tom had made arrangements with the Fowlersville Bank to receive all moneys expressed to it by him during the tour, and one of his earliest duties was to take a large part of the previous day's receipts to the express office in Chestertown and send it through to Fowlersville.

There was a packed house at the afternoon show, and

everything looked lovely up to a little after five o'clock, when the performers and executive staff were seated around the tables in the eating tent getting their supper.

Then the assembly, Tom in particular, were thrown into a fit of consternation by the sudden appearance of a small boy, not connected with the show, rushing into the tent and exclaiming:

"Mister, a man is settin' fire to the menagerie."

"What do you mean?" cried Tom, springing to his feet.

At the same time Jack McMasters and Taylor, the elephant keeper, started from their places at the table, and made a rush for the menagerie enclosure.

Through the still afternoon air came the loud trumpeting of Nero, the elephant, showing that something was clearly wrong in that quarter.

Tom pushed the small youth who had brought the warning aside and followed at the heels of the two men, while after him rushed all the men performers and attaches.

The very suspicion of a fire in the circus carried consternation with it.

It might mean the destruction of the whole or greater part of the show, and that would be a terrible calamity to all hands, from the proprietor down.

The elephant was making a terrible rumpus.

He seemed to be in a violent rage over something.

There were no signs of fire as yet as the men rushed toward the menagerie.

When they finally dashed into the enclosure where the animals were located a startling scene met their eyes.

On the ground lay the unconscious form of the workman who had been left on watch in the place, with a stream of blood running down his face, while further on the elephant had another attache encircled around the waist with his trunk and was swinging him back and forth in the air.

The man clutched a lighted naphtha torch in his fist, and his face was the picture of terror.

A pile of twigs and brushwood lay smoldering against the canvas side wall, and seemed on the point of bursting out into a blaze.

This small bonfire lay just within reach of the spot where Nero was chained to a stout post driven into the ground.

The huge beast seemed to be debating whether or not to dash the attache to the ground at his feet and crush him with one of his huge legs.

His little beady eyes lighted up and he stopped his noise at the appearance of Taylor, his keeper, followed by McMasters, Tom, and the others.

The boy who had given the alarm of fire brought up in the rear of the procession.

Taylor ordered Nero to drop his burden, and he did so obediently.

The keeper caught the man by the collar and yanked him on his feet, stepping on the torch as he did so.

McMasters and another man rushed at the smoldering pile of brushwood, kicked it away in a twinkling, and hastily trampled out every vestige of fire.

"What in thunder does all this mean?" demanded Taylor of his prisoner. "What did you have that torch in here for? Were you trying to fire the show?"

The fellow regarded his questioner in sullen silence.

Tom then took a hand in the matter.

"Look here, my man, what is the meaning of this con-

duct on your part? Did you start that fire against the side wall?"

The man made no answer.

"It's easy to see that that is just what the rascal did do," said Taylor, in a savage tone.

"Come here, my lad," said Tom, when he spied the boy who had rushed into the eating-tent with the startling intelligence. "Tell us what you saw in this tent."

"I was peeking through a slit in the canvas there," he said, pointing at the place where a huge gash had been made by a sharp knife, "and I seen that man creep up behind that man there on the ground and hit him on the head with something he had in his hand. Then he took that thing," pointing at the torch, "from behind the tiger cage, lighted it and set fire to that pile of stuff that was against the canvas. I thought he was goin' to set fire to the circus, so I ran and told you about it."

"You did the right thing, my boy, and you shall be rewarded for your conduct," said Tom. "Well, what have you to say for yourself now?" he added, turning to the prisoner.

"Nothin'," answered the man doggedly.

"That is equivalent to admitting your guilt," replied Tom sternly. "What was your reason for trying to destroy this show? You are one of my attaches, I believe?"

While Tom was speaking the unconscious workman was borne from the tent to the outside of the cook tent, where he was brought to his senses by the liberal use of cold water.

McMasters came over and grabbed the rascal, too.

"I'm willing to swear that it was you who tampered with the door of the tiger's cage yesterday afternoon during the show. What have you got to say about it?"

"Don't know nothin' about it," replied the fellow sulkily.

"Look here, my man," said Tom, "you have been caught at a trick that will send you to the penitentiary for a number of years. What's your grievance, if you have one, or did somebody on the outside put you up to this?"

"If you'll let me off I'll tell you," said the rascal finally.

"I can't agree to compromise such a piece of rascality with you. It is altogether too serious a matter. I will say this much, however, that it may be to your advantage to make a full confession, particularly if it throws any light on a conspiracy to injure this show."

"What's the use of me blowin' the gaff if I'm goin' to be punished anyway? I may as well be hung for a sheep as a lamb."

"It is likely to make considerable difference in the weight of your punishment. If it can be conclusively shown that you are merely a tool of others, I am willing to be as easy with you as circumstances will permit."

"I ought to be let off altogether if I turn State's evidence."

"Then you admit that you are acting as the agent of some party in the background?"

"I admit nothin'," replied the fellow doggedly.

"Your words, however, infer as much. Well, since you won't open your mouth to any advantage I'll have to call an officer and have you taken to jail."

Tom motioned to Jack, who went out in front and presently returned with one of the policemen detailed at the lot.

"Officer," said Tom, "I give this man into custody on the charge of attempted incendiarism. If you will wait a few

minutes I will send one of my people with you, also this lad, who is the chief witness against the prisoner."

"All right, sir," replied the policeman. "You are under arrest, my man," he added, laying his hand on the rascal's arm. "Will you go quietly, or shall I put the irons on you?"

"I'll go quietly," replied the fellow, in a sulky tone.

"Go in and finish your supper, Jack," said Tom to McMasters, "and then take this boy with you to the station. Fetch him back and give him an admission to the show. Here, my lad, is a bill for you," and he handed the boy a \$10 note, "and with it accept my thanks, and the thanks of everybody connected with the show for the timely warning you brought to us. Good-bye. That man who just went out will bring you back here after you have been to the police station, and will give you a ticket for the evening's performance."

Thus speaking, Tom returned to the eating-tent to finish his supper.

The women performers and attaches had waited in no little anxiety for news from the menagerie tent, and this was brought to them by the men on their return.

Tom found the whole bunch discussing the trouble, and lauding the elephant Nero for having saved the show by seizing the would-be incendiary at the critical moment and making a prisoner of him.

"That bull is worth his weight in gold, Mr. Smedley," said Jack, when Tom took his seat at the table again.

"He certainly deserves a large gold medal as an evidence of our appreciation of his valuable services in nabbing that rascal," replied the young circus proprietor; "and I'm going to see that he gets one, suitably inscribed. He saved the circus, and that boy did his share as well. Get his name and address, Jack. I mean to send him \$100 in addition to the ten-spot I handed him just now."

"All right, sir," replied the tiger trainer, rising from his seat and leaving the tent.

CHAPTER XI.

TOM UP AGAINST BAD WEATHER CONDITIONS.

By the time Jack McMasters returned with the lad who had given the warning about the fire in the menagerie tent, the ticket sellers were at work in their wagon and the crowd was filing into the big tent.

Jack passed the boy inside and then went away to attend to some duty connected with the show.

An hour later when the elephant entered the ring to go through his stunts with Taylor, his trainer, Tom walked out and made a short address to the people, telling them that but for Nero there would have been no show that night.

He explained how the elephant had prevented the incendiary from carrying out his dastardly purpose, and was the savior of the show.

After that speech the people applauded everything that Nero did, twice over, and when the beast retired he received a first-class ovation.

In the meantime Tom had sent for a notary to take down the statements of all the persons who had been present in the menagerie tent at the time the smoldering bonfire was discovered against the canvas side wall of the tent.

These statements were sent to the police to be used

against the incendiary, at the examination before a magistrate in the morning, as the circus would be many miles away on its route by that time.

These documents, with the boy's evidence, were easily sufficient to cause the judge to hold the prisoner for trial under a stiff bail.

The bail was unexpectedly furnished in cash by some man unknown to the Court, and the incendiary was allowed to go free.

That practically closed the case, for the man, who gave his name as Ben Spiggott, did not appear when his trial came on, his bail was forfeited, and a warrant was issued for his arrest, which, however, was never served.

In the meantime the Great Oriental and Occidental Circus continued to fill its dates along its route, everywhere meeting with the most flattering reception.

As a consequence money poured into the treasury, and the prospects indicated that this would be the banner year of the show.

Tom wrote often to Mr. Curtis Chase, the retired banker of Fowlersville, keeping him advised about the success he was meeting with on the road.

During the three weeks the show had been out so far Tom was only up against bad business once, and that was when a rainstorm set in after the parade in the town of Antioch.

And it rained hard, too.

Only a corporal's guard, as the saying is, attended the afternoon's performance on this occasion.

Nothing hardly will keep some enthusiasts away from their favorite sport, and for that reason probably 200 spectators braved the storm and sat through the somewhat dreary performance given that afternoon in Antioch.

Where the stretches of canvas composing the big top were sewed together the water penetrated through, and many of the people in the audience had to elevate their umbrellas to escape a wetting.

The heavy laboring of the groaning tent under the blasts of wind added to the feeling of misery and melancholy.

It was a doleful, drenching sight to see the horses wallowing in the ring, acrobats shivering and slipping, and O'Conner, the clown, his rueful face plastered over with his customary make-up, trying to extort a laugh from the bedraggled audience.

Straw was littered over the place in an endeavor to absorb the moisture, but it availed little.

The circus people while awaiting their turn to go on gazed longingly across the empty, sodden fields where they could see houses snug and tight, and gloom existed both within and without the tented field.

Scarcely anybody visited the side-show.

The barker didn't consider it worth while to face the storm even in a rubber coat, as there was nobody to spiel to, so the freaks had nothing to do but gossip among themselves, and keep out of range of the raindrops.

Think of the mournful and disheartening conditions the performers faced in the dressing-rooms on that beastly afternoon and evening in Antioch!

Scant as was the protection afforded by the swaying canvas side walls and the drenching and leaking covering overhead, the journey to and from the ring was a great deal worse.

The riders, acrobats, gymnasts, and others returned to

their trunks wet in the feet and plentifully sprinkled with raindrops.

The pretty costumes of the women were spotted, and the effect was very depressing.

Molly Stark looked like a beautiful wreck when she entered the women's dressing-room after her act, which she had been obliged to curtail owing to the slippery state of the back of her horse.

It would have been as much as her life was worth to have attempted her more daring stunts, and Tom had especially cautioned her to omit them.

As bad as the afternoon show was, the night one was even worse for both performers and spectators.

A brief let-up in the storm had enticed about 700 people to the lot, but they were no sooner seated than the storm came on again with augmented force.

A heroic effort was made to give the people who had dared the weather conditions the worth of their money, but on the whole the result was not successful.

Tom felt sorry for his performers, and for his workmen who had to pull the tents down and pack up in the drenching rain, and he also felt sorry for the spectators as they left the night show and faced the inclemency of the weather to get to their homes.

Then followed a long and dreary night's travel in the rain over muddy roads that harassed horses and drivers alike.

Fortunately the journey to Darien, the next show place on their route, was somewhat shorter than usual.

The cavalcade went directly to the lot, and the tents were put up and the ring made under miry conditions and a stormy-looking sky, though the rain itself had let up.

The cook got busy and breakfast was served at eight o'clock.

After that preparations were made for the parade.

Once the tents are pitched no weather can be so unpropitious as to thwart the parade.

All circuses advertise it as "positive," and the management must keep faith with the public or lose its confidence.

Tom could not afford to call it off, though it was bound to prove a dreary line of march.

He excused the women from taking part in it, however, and much of the finery was kept under the shelter of the tents.

The men wore mackintoshes and rubber boots, and protecting canvas hid the gilt and glory of the chariots.

As a matter of business the parade was necessary to convince the people that the circus was actually on hand.

To Tom's satisfaction the skies cleared a bit after dinner, and a good afternoon crowd assembled and paid for admission.

Probably half at least of these would not have been on hand but for the parade, as unsatisfactory as it was.

The circus also had a fairly full house at the evening performance, and on the whole Tom fared very much better at Darien than he had expected.

CHAPTER XII.

MORE FOUL PLAY.

Clear skies and sunshine greeted the circus at its next stopping place, a large town called Factoryville.

The show reached the lot about five in the morning, and all the tents but the big top were up by the time the performers turned out of their wagons.

"We're bound to show to the full capacity of the top at both performances to-day," said Jack McMasters to Tom, when they met that morning. "Factoryville has always supported the circus ever since Sellus put his show on the road."

"That's right," nodded Tom, rubbing his hands together with satisfaction over the outlook ahead.

"You've had fine luck so far, Tom," went on the tiger trainer, "with the exception of the Antioch date. We did uncommonly well yesterday at Darien considering the fierce outlook of the morning."

"Yes, I have no kick coming. On the whole, I expect to pull a big wad out this season."

"I'm glad to think that, Tom, for you're a mighty good fellow, and certainly deserve the success that seems to be coming your way. At the start-off a good many of the people were a bit disgruntled at the idea of a young chap like you taking hold as the proprietor of the show. They were accustomed to graybeards of extended experience like Sellus. They thought you'd run the outfit into the ground before you got fairly started. They didn't believe you had the capital nor the experience to make the show keep moving. They looked to see the circus go to pieces under the first bit of hard luck; but they've changed their minds since."

Tom laughed in a cheery way.

"The show is not likely to get stranded unless we should meet with a run of phenomenal hard luck, which is hardly probable, as times are good, the country is prosperous, and the public can afford the price easily enough."

"Well, I've good news for you this morning," said Jack. "What is it?"

"Rajah is in good shape again, and I am prepared to resume the act this afternoon."

"Glad to hear it, Jack. Have you notified the equestrian director of the fact?"

"Not yet, but I will do so right away."

As Tom walked away a rough-looking fellow, whose face was plentifully covered with whiskers, slouched up to him.

"Can I get a job with the show, boss?" he asked in a humble way.

"A job with the show?" ejaculated Tom, looking the man over critically.

"I'm a canvasman, and I am familiar with horses."

"Then you've worked with a circus before?"

The man nodded.

"What's your name, and what show were you with?" inquired Tom, with some interest, for he had a vacancy in his ranks that he wished to fill.

"My name is William Brown, and I was with Colonel Sands's circus last season."

"Got any evidence of that fact about you?"

The man shook his head.

"You'll have to take my word for it," he said. "Put me to work and I'll show the boss canvasman that I understand my business."

Tom looked the applicant over sharply again.

It struck him that there was something familiar about him.

"Have you worked for this show any time within the last three years?"

"No, sir. I never worked for this circus at any time."

"Well, I thought I'd seen you before, but I must be mistaken. Come with me."

Tom introduced the applicant to his boss canvasman, and left the matter of his employment to that person.

Later on Tom noticed William Brown on picket duty on the outside of the side walls of the main top while the afternoon show was going on.

Factoryville did not disappoint Tom with the reception it accorded the show.

The people came in such numbers that quite a mob had to be turned away from both performances, especially the evening one.

The bulk of these, however, was entertained by the side-show, so that Tom did not lose their coin altogether.

That night on the journey to Phalanx, where the circus was to show next day, an unusual series of accidents happened to the wagon train.

Three vehicles broke down at different times.

The singular thing about the matter, which delayed the show for an hour or two, was that the three casualties were of the same nature.

In each case a wheel came off the front axle, dumping the driver into the road.

After the third accident a critical examination was made of the wheels of the entire train, and in half a dozen more cases the nuts were found to have worked loose, and had not the discovery been made in time more breakdowns would have taken place.

It was the opinion of the drivers, as well as that of the wheelwright and blacksmith, that somebody had monkeyed with the screws while the wagons stood in the lot at Factoryville.

No one connected with the show was suspected as having had a hand in the matter, which was reported to Tom in the morning when he emerged from his van.

As the circus reached the lot late that morning, breakfast was hurried through with and the preparations for the parade rushed.

The cavalcade returned to the lot just in time to give the people a chance to eat their dinner and get ready for the afternoon performance.

Whenever Tom could manage it he was always around back of the curtain when Molly was on in her act.

He was so much attached to the girl that his anxiety for her safety was always uppermost in his mind.

This season her act was more daring and brilliant than ever.

She took high hurdles with her trained coal-black steed in a way that commanded the admiration of the audience.

She scorned the wide pad used by most women riders and did all her business on the rosined bare back of "Nellie," standing in various graceful positions.

Most skilled performers "stall," that is, in the execution of a particularly dangerous or difficult feat, they pretend to barely escape a serious fall, or make an unsuccessful attempt at accomplishment.

It gives the audience an exaggerated idea of the extreme peril or difficulty of the undertaking, and insures an outburst of applause when finally triumphantly done.

Molly could do this to perfection.

Tom had seen her "stall" frequently, and every time he himself was deceived by the natural way she did it, and his heart would jump into his mouth.

When he started to sympathize with her over an alleged fall after she left the ring she would laugh mischievously in his face and tell him it was only a fake tumble, and that he mustn't mind that.

"But you make me desperately nervous, Molly," he replied. "Some day you'll have a real fall, and if you are badly hurt think how broke up I'll be over it."

"Would you really feel awfully bad?" she asked, pinching his cheek playfully, while the love-light shone in her eyes, for she could see that he was seriously in earnest and she dearly loved to tease him.

"Would I? What did I tell you once about jumping into the river when you narrowly escaped from the tiger? You seem to be getting more daring every day, sweetheart, and I am almost afraid to come around and look at you do your turn."

"Then why come around, you silly boy?"

"Simply because I can't stay away unless something detains me against my will."

Molly laughed and after a swift glance around the space outside the dressing-rooms she leaned forward suddenly, gave him a kiss on his lips, and then fled into the room to change her costume.

During the evening performance at Phalanx when Tom went "behind," he found the new man, William Brown, holding Molly's mare near the curtain in readiness to lead her on when the girl got her music cue from the band.

Molly was talking to Jack McMasters at one side with her back to her horse.

There were several other performers in the space.

Outside the music stopped and loud applause, announcing the finish of the trapeze act which preceded Molly's, shook the tent.

In a moment or two the three performers—a man and two women—came running behind the curtain.

The clown and the ring-master, who officiated with the girl, walked out and a few seconds later the band blared and Molly darted through the curtain and made her bow to the assemblage.

At the same time Brown brought his disengaged hand to "Nellie's" mouth and started to follow.

One of the female gymnasts, who had stopped near the curtain to say something to the man who was going out to take down the apparatus on which she and her companions had just been performing, suddenly sprang forward with a cry and seized Brown by the arm.

The horse, slipping away from him, rushed after her mistress.

"What did you give that horse?" demanded the woman gymnast.

Her action and words attracted the surprised attention of Tom, Jack and the other performers near by.

"Nothin'. I didn't give her nothin'," replied Brown, in some confusion.

"Yes, you did. I saw you," cried the woman. "Mr. Smedley, I saw this man put something into Nellie's mouth."

"What!" cried Tom, seizing Brown by the arm as he

swung loose from the woman's grasp and started to make off. "Did you give that mare anything, you rascal?"

"No, I didn't," replied Brown, doggedly.

"I say he did," insisted the gymnast.

"Say, who are you? I've heard your voice before, my man. You can't get away before this thing is investigated."

At that moment Jack sprang at the man.

"I know who he is. He's Spiggott, the scoundrel who tried to fire the show at Chestertown," he exclaimed, grabbing the man's beard, which proved to be false, and tearing it off, leaving Spiggott's features exposed.

"Ha!" cried Tom. "There's foul play here."

"That's right, there is," said the woman gymnast, stooping and picking something out of the tanbark.

She held up a small round pill, about the size of a large marble.

"The rascal was trying to dose the mare," she said.

"It's a lie!" snarled Spiggott, as the crowd gathered about him in a threatening way. "It's a blamed lie!"

"Here's the proof," said the gymnast, holding up the pill.

"Thank Heaven he failed to give it to the horse," said Tom.

"How can you tell but the fellow had two in his hand and that the mare swallowed one of them?" said Jack. "Better stop the act, Tom," he said, forgetting to put the handle to the young proprietor's name in his excitement. "If Nellie got one of those pills in her you can't tell what may happen to Molly in those high hurdle jumps."

"My heavens!" cried Tom, turning pale with apprehension. "Here, hold the villain, Jack, while I go outside."

Tom rushed through the curtain to find Molly in the midst of her act, the band playing a loud, rapid air, the ring-master cracking his whip, and the clown following Molly and the horse with a comic burst of speed that set the spectators into a roar of laughter.

As Tom left Jack to look after Spiggott the rascal made a dash to escape.

Jack was after him in a moment with the others at his heels.

The fellow was in for a terrible handling the moment the angry men got their hands on him, and he knew it.

Seeing that Jack was bound to catch him, he stopped, drew a slungshot from his pocket and struck at the tiger trainer.

The round end of the weapon caught Jack on the head and opened his scalp.

As he staggered back dazed and bleeding, like an animal in the shambles, Spiggott dashed through an opening of the tent and vanished into the darkness of the night.

CHAPTER XIII.

ALMOST A TRAGEDY.

The hurdles were being placed in position for Molly's mare to clear as Tom dashed through the curtain.

They were of varying sizes, the biggest one opposite the press box near the entrance to the ring.

The band played louder and faster, the ring-master cracked his whip quicker, and the clown fell over himself, creating a big laugh.

"Hoopla!" cried Molly, as she took the first hurdle standing on one foot.

The spectators grew excited as the girl took the second one and then turned a somersault, alighting as graceful as a sylph on the flanks of Nellie.

"Allez! Allez!" cried Molly, in French, meaning "Go! Go!"

The mare understood and increased her speed.

Her eyes were all ablaze with a new and strange light, and Molly's, too, flashed with the excitement of the moment.

The mare barely cleared the next to the highest hurdle, sending a shower of material to the ring.

Her nostrils expanded and she appeared to stagger as she struck the sawdust.

The fair rider did not notice that there was anything the matter with her horse.

Tom had rushed up to the edge of the ring just beyond the final hurdle.

It was impossible as well as impolitic to interfere with the act at that thrilling moment, for Molly and the mare were approaching him at lightning-like speed.

The young circus man, not knowing whether there really was danger in the air or not, watched the oncoming girl with tingling nerves and a thumping heart.

"Hoopla!" cried Molly, as the mare rose to the final and highest hurdle.

But the horse didn't clear it by two feet.

There was a terrible crash.

Down went horse and hurdle in a confused jumble, while Molly, with a thrilling scream, was pitched forward through the air, head first, toward the edge of the ring.

With a cry of consternation Tom sprang forward.

The girl landed in his arms like a stone from a catapult, and Tom went over backward, striking his head on the edge of the ring where it was packed hard.

The music stopped short and the audience rose in terror and excitement over the accident.

The ring-master and clown ran toward the spot where Tom lay stunned and motionless on the ground, with Molly clasped tightly, but unhurt, in his arms.

Several attaches ran into the ring to assist Nellie to her feet from the wreck of the hurdle.

The mare staggered to and fro like a drunken man, though she had not been injured by the fall, as the men led her off through the curtain.

The ring-master released the fair rider from Tom's embrace and asked her if she was hurt.

Molly made no answer, but sank down beside her senseless lover and clasping his head in her arms burst into hysterical weeping.

"Get some water and chase somebody after stimulants, O'Conner," said the ring-master to the clown. "Hurry, for it's Mr. Smedley who is hurt."

A reporter in the box jumped over into the ring with a flask of whiskey in his hand, and tendered it to the ring-master.

"He is dead," sobbed Molly. "Oh, do something to save him. Please do," looking appealingly at the ring-master through a veil of tears.

"He's not dead, Miss Stark. Let me hold his head while I give him a dose of this stuff."

"No, no; nobody shall hold him but me. It is my right. He is mine—mine!" sobbed the girl.

The ring-master regarded her with unfeigned astonishment.

Then he figured that the shock she had suffered had upset her mental poise and consequently she did not know what she was saying.

"Better go into the dressing-room and compose yourself till you're called back."

But the girl wouldn't listen to him.

She amazed the ring-master by kissing Tom's lips again and again, and calling him by endearing names.

"The girl is clean off her base," he muttered to the reporter. "She must imagine that it's her father who caught and saved her."

He put the flask to Tom's lips and poured some of the whiskey down his throat.

It had an immediate effect on the young circus man.

He coughed, opened his eyes and met Molly's pathetic and tearful gaze.

"Molly," he breathed, "are you safe?"

"Yes, Tom, dear. I'm all right. Are you much hurt?" she asked in a tender tone.

"I don't think so," replied Tom, sitting up and then getting on his feet.

He felt of his head, which was aching him quite a bit, and he looked dizzily around upon the sea of excited faces turned in his direction.

Then he pulled himself together and instinctively he did what he knew ought to be done—he caught Molly by the hand and led her toward the center of the ring, and they both bowed as the audience applauded them with a gusto that shook the tent.

Molly's act had come to an abrupt conclusion, but the spectators got more thrills out of it than if the act had gone to its proper finish.

Tom and Molly retired and then the show went on as if nothing out of the way had taken place.

The young proprietor and the fair rider, whose life he had probably saved again, held an impromptu levee between the dressing-rooms.

Tom was praised and Molly congratulated over her escape.

"I don't see how Nellie came to strike that last hurdle so awkwardly," said Molly.

"The mare was doped," said Jack McMasters, whose head was tied up.

"Doped!" exclaimed the girl, in astonishment.

"Yes. She looked like a drunken loon when she was led from the ring."

"I don't understand," gasped Molly.

"A rascal who wormed himself into the show to try and put things on the hog was caught at the trick," said Jack. "He's the same scoundrel who was caught by Nero when he was setting fire to the menagerie top. I can't understand why he's at large. The jail is the proper place for such chaps as he. He seems to have rejoined the show in disguise to get revenge, or to continue the crooked work he set out to do before we caught him."

Tom then explained the whole thing to the girl, and she was shown the pill that had been dropped by Spiggott.

"If the mare had taken both pills she never would have got to the last hurdle," said Tom. "You'd have been thrown probably at the second one."

"I'm so thankful that I escaped," she said. "And I owe my life again to you."

"It ought to belong to me after that," he whispered in her ear.

"It does," she answered softly, "forever and forever."

Then she left him and entered the dressing-room.

"What's the matter with your head, Jack?" asked Tom, who had noted with surprise that McMasters appeared to have received a wound of some kind.

"That rascal tried to make his escape when you rushed into the ring," said Jack. "I headed him off when he pulled a slung-shot on me and gave me a clip that knocked me dizzy for some moments. In the confusion he made his escape."

"The dickens he did! That's bad. I expected to put him under lock and key," said Tom. "As long as he's at liberty we may expect to hear from him again in some way. All hands must be notified to be on the lookout for him. He's got it in for this show, and will try to do us an injury if he can find a loophole to get his work in. Between you and me, Jack, I'm satisfied that there is somebody behind him—somebody who has a strong grouch against this show."

"Who could have anything against this show?"

"That's what gets me. If you remember when we caught that rascal in his effort to set fire to the menagerie top he as good as admitted that somebody was behind him."

"I recollect that you asked him if somebody on the outside hadn't put him up to trying to do the show, and he said he'd tell you if you let him clear off."

"I wouldn't compromise a felony with him, so he closed up tight."

"I can't imagine what enemy you can have," said Jack.

"Nor I. If I had the least suspicion it might give me the clue I need."

"If we can nab this fellow again we must put him through the third degree and see if we can make him confess. He's a dangerous scamp. I am satisfied that it was he who let Rajah out of his cage, though how he managed the matter so deftly beats me."

"He is certainly reckless of the consequences attending his acts. Molly, I fear, would have been either killed or crippled for life to-night if I hadn't been on hand to catch her."

"It's most remarkable that this is the second time you saved the girl's life," said Jack. "If she doesn't make you the best wife in the world one of these days she will be the most ungrateful person that ever walked on two legs."

"I'm willing to take my chances on that," smiled Tom.

"By the way, you know that three of the wagons broke down last night along the route, and that others would have followed if a close examination of the wheels of the rest of the vehicles hadn't been made."

"So I heard this morning."

"No one connected with the show was suspected as being the author of the trick. I've no doubt you will easily guess after what happened this evening who was really at the bottom of it."

"You mean Spiggott?"

"That's who I mean. We'll have to maintain a sharp watch after this or more trouble is likely to crop up when we least expect it."

"That's right. It won't be healthy for the rascal if I get my hands on him, I can tell you that. I owe him something on my personal account for this cut I've got on my block. When I get through squaring that account with him I'm thinking there won't be much fight left in him."

"He deserves all you may hand out to him. I don't know but I might be tempted to handle him pretty roughly myself," said Tom, thinking of Molly's narrow escape.

"Well, I'll go around among the boys and tell them to be on the watch for the fellow. Anybody seen prowling around the wagons or the tents must be captured if possible and brought before you."

"That's the idea. Eternal vigilance seems to be the price of our safety at this stage of the game."

With those words Tom and Jack parted for the time being.

CHAPTER XIV.

A NIGHT ALARM.

Miss Annie Russell, professionally known as "M'lle Eugenie," the aerial performer who had detected Spiggott, alias William Brown, giving the bolus to the mare Nellie, received a \$100 bill from Tom next morning when the show reached Huylerstown, for the service she had rendered the management, and, indirectly, Molly Stark.

Spiggott's description was furnished to all the canvasmen, drivers and other workmen attached to the show, and orders issued to keep a sharp lookout for him, or, in fact, for anybody hanging around the lot whose actions might be thought in the slightest way suspicious.

Nellie didn't go out with the parade in Huylerstown, but she was in first-class shape to go on in the afternoon performance.

Molly watched her work closely, particularly when she took the hurdles, and the girl did not take as many chances as usual that day.

Tom also took his stand within reach of the highest hurdle to be ready to act in case anything happened.

Nothing did happen, however.

The mare cleared the last jump in her customary brilliant style, and the young circus man breathed easier.

The show did big business at Huylerstown, as Tom expected, for it was Saturday, and that fact helped things.

The next day was Sunday, the circus man's day of rest and relaxation.

Mr. Sellus had so planned the route in advance that on no one night, except Saturday, was the journey so long that, everything favorable, there would be tardy arrival at the lot where the organization was to show.

During the week the "jumps" averaged about twenty miles.

Trips of thirty to forty miles were reserved for Saturday night, and consequently the circus, barring a rest along the roadside for breakfast for man and beast, was generally on the move up to Sunday noon, often later.

After leaving Huylerstown the Great Oriental and Occidental Circus reached Rushville, a railroad town of some size, at two o'clock Sunday afternoon.

Only the menagerie and the eating and cook tents were pitched, as Tom did not believe in working the canvasmen

and others connected with the laboring department any more on that day than was absolutely necessary.

As soon as the wagons were in the lot and the workmen were unloading the above-mentioned tents, most of the performers deserted the ground.

Later on they could have been found registered at one of the local hotels for the afternoon and night, for a room and a good bed all to themselves was a luxury denied them during the week.

Then the hotel reading-room offered them facilities for writing and reading that could not be found at the lot.

Tom and Molly enjoyed the day in their own way.

They strolled about town together—both attired in their best duds—and were very happy to be in each other's society.

Tom hadn't asked the girl's father yet for his daughter's hand, but Stark wasn't blind to the way the wind blew, and he was tickled to death to think his little girl, as he called her, had made such a good catch as the owner and manager of the show.

After what had happened it was impossible for Tom and Molly to keep their secret from the performers, and there was hardly a woman in the show but envied the fair rider's great luck.

Tom dined with Molly and her father at the best hotel in Rushville that afternoon, and then the young couple went out for another walk in the moonlight.

At ten o'clock Tom bade the girl good-night at the hotel and returned to his private wagon at the lot.

The interior was as comfortable and roomy as the average hotel room, and, besides, he didn't care to be away from the safe at night, for it contained the whole of the Huylerstown receipts, and something over.

This wagon had been under guard ever since Tom left the lot, and it was anchored among the sleeping quarters of the canvasmen and other workmen for safety.

Tom, after a long talk with Jack McMasters, who had stood guard since dark over the wagon, turned in about half-past eleven with a loaded revolver under his pillow and the door doubly barred.

He was soon in the land of dreams and would probably have slept serenely until early morn if something hadn't awakened him about three o'clock.

The wagon had two barred windows, and at one of them somebody was trying to effect an entrance.

He had sawed the bars off, opened the glass sash, which worked on a pair of hinges, and had one leg and a part of his body inside when Tom awoke with a start.

The moon had gone down and the window offered such a dark background that Tom couldn't make out the intruder very clearly.

However, the person, whoever he was, had no right to be at the window, and so Tom's hand quickly slid under his pillow and grabbed the revolver.

He cocked it under the clothes, then he reached out his hand and took up a portable electric light tube, capable of illuminating any object at short range.

After listening a moment or two, and feeling satisfied that the intruder had got rid of the window bars and was entering the wagon, he touched a spring in the tube and threw a dazzling light around the opening.

"What are you up to, you rascal?" demanded the young circus owner. "Stop where you are or I'll fire!"

"Don't shoot and I'll get out," replied a voice that seemed familiar to Tom.

"Remain where you are. Since you've taken the trouble to cut away those bars it is evident that you came here for no honest purpose. People of your stamp are more at home behind the bars, so I'll have to ask you to remain in your present situation until I can have you taken in hand and sent to the police station. Later on you can make your explanations to a magistrate."

During the short conversation the intruder had been furtively working his hand around to his hip pocket.

Reaching it he suddenly yanked out his gun and fired at Tom before the boy suspected what he was up to.

The bullet missed Tom by a foot and under cover of the smoke the man tried to make his escape.

Tom returned the fire, but lost a moment or two owing to the unexpected action on the rascal's part.

This, coupled with the cloudy atmosphere of the wagon, made him miss the intruder.

A second shot was more successful.

Tom heard him fall outside.

He ran to the window and looked out, but could see no signs of his man, whom he judged had crawled under the wagon.

Tom fired two more shots in the air to arouse his men, and they soon came tumbling out of the other wagons.

The rascal managed to get clean off, which showed that he could not have been badly wounded.

When the hunt had been given up, Tom told his story and showed the work of the crook at the window.

"Do you know," he said to Jack, "I've a sneaking idea that chap was Spiggott. His voice sounded like Spiggott's, at any rate."

"Then you didn't catch a view of his face?" said Jack.

"It was partially masked by a big handkerchief, which hung from above his nose down."

Tom then re-entered his wagon and after a time fell asleep again.

CHAPTER XV.

AN IMPORTANT DISCOVERY.

Rushville panned out a barrel of money at the afternoon and evening performances, and then the show went on again.

A sharp lookout was kept for Spiggott as the days went by, but he didn't turn up, and Tom at length began to believe that he had seen the last of the fellow.

He was mistaken, however, as the rascal was as tenacious as a bulldog, and had a strong reason for following the show, which he did, disguised as a tramp.

One hot July day the Great Oriental and Occidental Circus reached Youngstown at dawn.

In the meantime Tom had been sending checks to Mr. Chase to cover his notes as they fell due.

The parade left the lot about nine o'clock, and passed through the principal streets of the big town.

Tom looked for a record crowd at the afternoon show, and he was not disappointed.

Tom was in front up to the moment that Molly's act

came on, and then, as usual, he went around to watch her.

The animal soared over the last hurdle like a bird on the wing and then the band stopped and "M'lle Celestine" was on the sawdust kissing her finger-tips to the excited and applauding spectators.

She met Tom on the other side of the curtain as she passed through to the dressing-room.

"Whom do you suppose I recognized in the audience, Tom?" she said, placing her hand on his arm.

"You've got me, Molly," he answered. "Who did you see in the audience that you knew?"

"A circus man I was introduced to in New York during the winter."

"Who was he? No circus man asked for the usual recognition of the profession at the door to my knowledge."

"His name is Ogden Skinner."

"Ogden Skinner!" ejaculated Tom. "I met him at Fowlersville. He came there to buy this show from Mrs. Sellus, but he couldn't put up the price in cash. He wouldn't have got it anyway, for my backer was prepared to raise his ante if need be. Are you sure you wasn't mistaken? Might have been a man who looked like him."

"I'm almost certain it was he."

"I'll find out. The doorkeeper probably knows him and passed him in without bringing the fact to my attention. I wonder what he's doing out here in Youngstown."

When she went into the dressing-room Tom went out in front and made inquiries about Skinner of the doorkeeper and another member of his executive staff.

The doorkeeper didn't know the circus man, and had not passed him in free.

The assistant press agent, who traveled with the show, knew Skinner in a general way, but had not seen or passed him into the big tent.

"Molly must have been mistaken," thought Tom, and dismissed the matter from his mind.

When the people came trooping out after the performance Tom was standing out in front.

He was watching the people in a casual way when a man passed him who looked the very image of Ogden Skinner.

"By Jove!" Tom muttered. "If that isn't Skinner it's his double. He must have paid his way in."

The young circus proprietor was a bit curious to learn if the man really was Skinner or not.

With that idea he followed him down the street, intending to address him.

Skinner, or his double, reached the corner of the circus lot and stopped.

Tom was overtaking him fast when a man, dressed like a tramp, suddenly appeared from the doorway of a corner grocery and walked up to the presumed Skinner.

There was something familiar about the tramp to Tom's eye.

"That's Spiggott for a dollar," thought the young circus man.

He saw the two men back up against a long billboard covered with his own posters.

He quickly vaulted the fence surrounding the lot and made his way up behind the line of billboards.

The sound of the men's voices guided him to a spot right back of them.

Placing his ear to a big crack between two of the boards he listened.

"If you're willin' to let me have \$100 in advance, Mr. Skinner, I'll do the trick. But it's pretty risky," said the tramp.

"It seems to me, Spiggott, that I have been doing little else than letting you have cash in advance for attempts to put the Great O. & O. out of business, not speaking about the \$1,500 I sacrificed to get you out of jail in Chestertown, and you've made a rank failure of every job," said Skinner, impatiently.

"It wasn't my fault that the schemes failed," replied Spiggott, in answer to Skinner's remarks. "In the first place, when I let the tiger out of his cage, which was done in an uncommonly slick way, the beast went for that circus rider instead of the audience, as we calculated on, and Smedley picked up a rifle that was handy and shot the beast before he could do any damage. Then, when I had everything fixed to set fire to the menagerie tent that blamed elephant did me up, cuss him! In the third attempt I made to queer the show, one of them female trapezists caught me in the act of dosing the black mare that does the hurdles. However, I got one pill down her gullet, and that would have done the business for the gal's act for good, only Smedley comes to the front and saves her ag'in. Did you ever hear of harder luck? Then the reason why the show didn't break down on the road to Factoryville that night was because the wheels didn't come off as quick as I figured on."

"This new scheme that you propose to work for another hundred of my good money is just as liable to be a fiasco as the others. I thought you could put the show on the bum so the boy owner would be glad to sell out cheap to me."

"It may and it may not, but I can't afford to take it on under a hundred plunks. It's worth every cent of that to take the risk whether it goes through or not."

"That may be; but I don't care to sacrifice any more money for nothing. You do it successfully and I'll pay you \$200. If you fail you'll get nothing."

"I ought to have a hundred anyway," growled Spiggott. "I've got into all kinds of trouble tryin' to do your dirty work, and——"

"You've been well paid for it," retorted Skinner. "What more do you want?"

"I've been paid, yes, after a fashion. S'pose I'm nabbed by any of the circus people, where will I fetch up at?"

"If you're arrested again I'll be on hand to bail you out."

"You'd better, or I might give you away. I sha'n't go to State prison alone if I can help myself."

"Look here, Spiggott, I don't want any threats."

"I ain't makin' no threats, I'm only warnin' you, that's all."

"Well, I don't like the way you talk. However, I'll take another chance and give you the \$100 you ask for. When do you expect to be able to let the animals out of their cages?"

"To-night, before the people are admitted to the tent. Bill Jones will be on watch there; but I'll put him out of business like I did Bob Sawyer. Then I'll open all the cages, or most all of them, and the beasts will scatter in short order."

"You do it and I'll pay you the second hundred dollars,

otherwise you'll only get the \$100 I'm going to give you now."

"All right, Mr. Skinner. I'll earn that \$200, don't you fret."

"I trust you will," said Skinner, dryly. "If you turn the trick you'll find me at the American House, where I am stopping. If you fail me this time you may as well make yourself scarce, for I shall take a train for the East and throw up any further efforts to take a fall out of the show, for the present at least."

Thus speaking Skinner turned on his heel and walked away, leaving Spiggott to go his own way.

Tom went to the eating-tent where he knew he would find his family of employees assembled at their evening meal.

He walked inside and walked over to Jack McMasters.

"I want to see you immediately after supper on a matter of the greatest importance, Jack," he said.

"All right, Mr. Smedley," nodded Jack.

Then Tom went to his seat and a waiter stepped up to serve him.

CHAPTER XVI.

CONCLUSION.

"Jack," said Tom, when he met the tiger trainer after supper, "an attempt is going to be made about half-past seven to set the animals in the menagerie free."

Jack gasped and looked at Tom in astonishment.

"Set the animals free!" he ejaculated.

"Yes. I overheard the plot. That's why I was late at the meal."

"Who has an idea of doing such a risky thing as that? There is always a watchman in the tent."

"There was a watchman there when Spiggott tried to set the place on fire, and he would have succeeded but for Nero."

"But Spiggott being an employee at the time had the chance of coming on the watchman unawares. No outsider could do that."

"Spiggott intends to repeat the trick to-night."

"Do you mean to say that that rascal is hanging around the show?"

"I do. I saw him a little while ago. He's disguised as a tramp."

"And he's going to try and let the animals loose to-night?"

"That's his intention."

"Well, if he does it I'll eat my head," said Jack, wagging his head in a determined way.

"We must set a trap for him, and I leave that to your ingenuity."

"Leave the rascal to me. I'll guarantee it will be his last bit of crooked work for many a day to come."

"You must fix matters so he'll be taken in the act, with witnesses to convict him before a court of justice. I'll spend a thousand dollars or more to send him to State prison."

"I'll see that he's caught redhanded."

"Very well. I rely on you. Now, I've also discovered the person who has paid him to injure the show."

"You have?"

"I have."

"Who is he?"

"A circus man named Ogden Skinner."

"The man who was at Fowlersville this spring trying to buy the show?"

"The same man."

"How did you find it out?"

Tom explained how Molly Stark, who had been introduced to him during the winter, had seen him in the audience.

"When she told me that," continued Tom, "I wondered why he had not made himself known to me, as show people usually do, for we are always glad to meet well-known professional people and accord them the usual courtesies. I thought probably that the doorkeeper or Spicer had passed him in, and I asked them if they had done so. Neither, however, had done so, though Spicer knows Skinner by sight and reputation. Then I came to the conclusion that Molly had been deceived by a fancied resemblance. I was standing in front when the people came out, and I saw a man who looked to be the counterpart of Skinner in the crowd. My curiosity was aroused and I followed him, intending to make sure of his identity. Before I came up with him he was met by a trampish-looking person whom I partially recognized as Spiggott. They entered into conversation at the corner of the lot below."

Tom then told Jack how he had managed to get near them behind the billboards and listened undiscovered to their conversation, repeating the substance of their talk.

"A mighty lucky thing that you followed that rascal," said Tom. "There is no saying what Spiggott might not have been able to accomplish, for he's a desperate villain. Well, you go on and attend to your business. I'll look after Spiggott, and if I don't give a good account of him you can fire me from the show."

Tom nodded cheerfully and walked away.

He knew he could thoroughly depend on Jack from the ground floor up.

Jack was practically his right-hand man at the back of the show, although he was not publicly invested with any particular authority.

McMasters knew just what to do in this emergency, and he went about the work in a way to insure success.

Bill Jones, who was on the watch, was duly instructed to give Spiggott every chance to reach the cages by keeping himself well in the background.

Jack and four other hands secreted themselves at convenient places about the menagerie.

Then all became quiet in the tent.

As the ticket wagon was opened for the sale of admissions a dark figure suddenly slipped into the menagerie tent and looked cautiously around.

It was Spiggott.

He seemed surprised not to see Jones, or somebody else, on watch.

He made a hurried investigation of the tent, and believing that it had been left momentarily unguarded, he proceeded to put his nefarious scheme into execution.

The first thing he did was to rush for the tiger's cage.

He drew the heavy bolt and tried to open the door about an inch or two.

Jack, however, had wired it so that it could not be opened.

Spiggott looked disappointed, but without losing much time he started for the big black bear's cage.

As he laid his hand on the bolt he was suddenly nabbed from behind by Jack.

"So we've caught you at last, have we, Spiggott?" said the tiger trainer.

Spiggott made a spring to escape, but the effort was fruitless.

He found himself surrounded by a crowd of circus hands.

"The game is up with you, you rascal," said Jack. "Tie his arms, boys."

In a few moments he was quite helpless.

"Fetch him along," said McMasters, leading the way into the space between the dressing-rooms.

Word was sent around to Tom, and he presently appeared.

"We caught him in the act of freeing Old Grizzly," said Jack, "after he had first drawn the bolt on Rajah's cage."

"What have you got to say for yourself, Spiggott?" demanded Tom.

Spiggott had nothing to say.

"You've got a whole lot to answer for, my man, and I'll see to it that you sha'n't get off so easily this trip as you did at Chestertown. Are you willing to blow on the man who employed you to do this dirty work?"

Spiggott refused to open his mouth.

"Very well. Hold your jaw if you prefer to, but I know the man anyway. It is Ogden Skinner."

"How do you know that?" asked Spiggott, in sulky surprise.

"No matter how I know it, but I do. I know a whole lot more than you think about you and Skinner. Don't imagine I've been asleep since you've been plotting against us in the dark. There are more ways than one of running the guilty to the end of their tether. You've reached yours this time."

"I'll blow the whole game if you give me a chance," said Spiggott eagerly.

"I know the whole game already. I know you're responsible for all the accidents we've so narrowly escaped. I know that Skinner bailed you out at Chestertown, and then forfeited the money. I know that he paid you \$100 at the corner of the lot less than two hours ago, to let the animals in the menagerie loose just as the public was admitted to the tent, and you were to get another \$100 if the scheme went through successfully. Skinner is at the American House waiting for you to turn up, but he'll be disappointed. Jack, fetch the officer, and we'll get rid of this rascal."

Ten minutes later Spiggott was on his way to the police station.

Tom and Jack remained behind in Youngstown that night in order to appear against the rascal.

Ogden Skinner was arrested that night at the American House and locked up, charged with conspiracy to ruin the circus so he could buy it in cheap.

At the examination in the police court next morning Spiggott was held for trial.

After a consultation with the public prosecutor, Spiggott

was promised immunity from his latest crime if he would testify against Skinner.

He was caught by the bait, and on his evidence Skinner was himself held for trial at the next term of the court.

Spiggott's testimony was taken down in writing and he swore to its truth.

Then he expected to be allowed to go free.

But that was where he was fooled.

As soon as the public prosecutor moved for his discharge from custody and the judge nodded his acquiescence, an officer, sent on from Chestertown, walked up to Spiggott as he was leaving the courtroom and arrested him on the old charge of incendiarism, for which he jumped his bail.

He was taken to Chestertown, tried, convicted and sent to the State prison for twenty years.

Skinner was also convicted of conspiracy and got ten years.

In the meantime the Great Oriental and Occidental Circus and Menagerie continued on its route, and no more accidents happened that season, which proved to be a phenomenally successful one.

In fact, Tom was able that season to repay over one-half of his indebtedness to Mr. Chase.

The show finished up at New Orleans, where the performers and most of the workmen were let go, and then the paraphernalia and the menagerie were returned by easy stages to Fowlersville, where they went into winter quarters as usual.

Tom spent a part of the winter visiting the Stark home, where he was received as Molly's future husband.

Molly, of course, went out with the show next season, and Jack McMasters went, too, with Rajah, who had been taught some new tricks.

That season was also a good one, and Tom nearly cleared off the mortgage on the show—in fact, there was not much left for him to liquidate.

At the close of the third season he and Molly were married in the big top before the whole crowd of employees, on the Sunday following the closing of the show.

They got a fine send-off.

Jack proposed the health of the bride, and the tent resounded with the enthusiasm of the response.

Tom expressed his thanks in well-put words, and his wife blushed prettily in her happiness, while a smile of approval and contentment rested on her father's face.

And thus we leave them and the Great Oriental and Occidental Show to that happiness and prosperity they so richly deserved.

THE END.

Read "PLAYING FOR MONEY; OR, THE BOY TRADER OF WALL STREET," which will be the next number (144) of "Fame and Fortune Weekly."

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GOOD STORIES.

The largest library in the world, which is the Bibliotheque Nationale, at Paris, contains three million volumes. The next largest library is in the British Museum, where reposing on musty shelves are two million books. The Imperial library at St. Petersburg contains a million and a half volumes. The New York City library is the largest in the United States and contains one million fourteen thousand books. The Harvard library is the largest college library in America, containing nine hundred and ten thousand volumes.

According to reports, work at Thebes has brought to light the ruins of what is thought to be the palace of King Cadmus, the legendary founder of the city. Some pieces of sculpture, forming probably the pediment of the palace door, have been found. Colorless vases and five large amphoræ, intended for holding oil and wine, as well as wall pictures, some merely drawings and some in colors, were among the finds. Besides bricks, pearl necklaces, gold, lead blocks and other objects more than 3,000 years old are reported.

Most people at some time or other have used the expression "went like the wind," wishing to convey the idea of extraordinary velocity. Coming down to actual figures, however, the wind is not such a speedy traveler after all. The month of March more than any other in the year has a windy record, so the figures supplied by the local Weather Bureau station for the month will do to illustrate the fallacy of the expression. From the first to the thirty-first the wind movement as registered at the top of the Federal Building, Boston, was 8,336 miles, or an average of 278 miles a day for thirty days. Here is an average of only 11½ miles an hour, a speed which even a slow moving freight steamer approaches.

In a single day Geronimo, when in his prime, ran forty miles on foot, rode 500 miles on one stretch, as fast as he could change horses, and so completely wore out the column which finally captured him that three sets of officers were needed to finish the chase, and not more than one-third of the troopers who started were at the finish. Wrinkled and crafty and cruel is his swarthy face to-day, but the fire of his infernal energy has died and he is no more than a relic of the Geronimo of whom Gen. Miles said after their first meeting: "He rode into our camp and dismounted, a prisoner. He was one of the brightest, most resolute, determined men I ever met, with the sharpest, clearest dark eye. Every movement showed power and energy."

The origin of gloves is very ancient. Some authorities assert that they were known in Bible times, from references made to "shoes" which were thought to be identical with gloves. The first clear account of gloves comes, however, from

Xenophon. This writer speaks of the Persians wearing gloves on their hands to protect them from the cold. Homer describes Laertes working in his garden with gloves upon his hands to protect them from the thorns, and Varro mentions this apparel as being worn by the Romans. Gloves have been tokens of solemn and important things from the ninth century. They were adopted as a rite of the church, and later the transferring of lands or titles was always attended with the presentation of gloves. In the eleventh century the method of challenging to single combat by throwing down a glove was instituted, and this custom still remains in some countries. Gloves were not worn by women until after the Reformation.

A lady who was perfectly well, but fancied she was suffering from fever called on an old and experienced physician to consult him. She described her symptoms at some length, and he listened patiently. At last he said: "I think I understand your case, madam. Sit perfectly still a few moments, and let me look at you." She complied, and he eyed her attentively for nearly a minute, glancing at his watch once or twice in the meantime. "There is nothing the matter with you, madame," he said. "You haven't the slightest indication of fever. Your heart beat is perfectly normal." "Why, how do you know, doctor?" she asked in surprise. "You didn't feel of my pulse." "I didn't need to," he answered. "I counted the vibrations of the ostrich-feather on your hat." And he bowed her out.

JOKES AND JESTS.

"You are cheerful as a tombstone this morning?" "Naturally." "Why naturally?" "I am buried in thought."

Jones—Who is the really perfect man, I should like to know? Brown—The man your wife was going to marry if she hadn't married you.

"I have come, madam, to take your gas meter out." "I'm glad to hear it, for it's done nothing since it's been here but take me in!"

"It was a personally conducted tour." "How are they?" "All to the good. Post-cards were brought to us at every town. Often we didn't have to leave the train."

Tody—Jennie tells me young Woodby proposed to her last night. Viola—I don't think I know him. Is he well off? Tody—He certainly is. She refused him.

"I hear that Jones' four daughters are married." "Is that so? I suppose he's glad he's got them off his hands." "Not exactly. He now has to keep the four husbands on their feet."

"I don't think she'll ever marry him," said Mrs. Henpeck. "She quarrels with him so and is so domineering that—" "She is?" interrupted Henpeck. "I'll bet they've been secretly married already!"

The teacher in the Darktown school was hearing the class in geography. "What is known as the Great Divide?" she asked. "Cuttin' a big watermelon!" answered little 'Rastus with a grin that showed all his ivories.

A member of the school board of a certain Pennsylvania town relates the sad case of a young woman who failed to pass her examination for appointment as teacher in the public school of that place. The mother of the disappointed young woman was asked by a friend whether the daughter had succeeded in running the gantlet of the examiners. "No," was the reply in mournful tone, "Jinny didn't pass at all. Maybe you won't believe, sir, but them examiners asked the poor girl about things that happened years and years before she was born."

THE PURSUIT

By Alex. Armstrong.

I passed the best part of my life in America, and have met with many adventures, but the one I am about to relate is the most vivid in my memory, as no doubt you will believe, when I have related it.

Out on the broad prairie.

There was nothing to disturb our sense of blissful solitude, except the great circle of emigrant wagons drawn up for the night, to give us the feeling of companionship without unpleasant proximity.

The whole scene around us breathed of peace, yet, with love's quick insight, I saw that there was a cloud over the spirit of one dearer to me than all else.

"What is it, Mary?" I asked. "Something troubles you. Is it that you begin to doubt the wisdom of your father's move to a wild Western home? Not that? Then do you regret my imprudence in deciding to seek my fortune also at his side?"

"Harry, I do feel unaccountably depressed this evening. My mind keeps dwelling on John Barton's oath. You remember he swore that he would follow and snatch me from you before we had crossed the Rocky Mountains. I shall not feel easy till we have crossed them in safety. You need not tell me that Barton is not here; but I feel frightened all the same."

I did not wonder at my dear one's horror of John Barton's oath.

I, too, had often thought, with a vague uneasiness, of the livid, vengeful countenance and hissing voice, full of hate and revenge, of Mary's rejected lover, as he stood confronting us on our departure from our native town, and swore a solemn oath that she should never reach her destination, nor ever become my wife.

He received no word of reply, only a blow from my clenched hand that laid him prostrate on the road.

Two months had passed since then.

More silently than was our wont, we entered the camp and proceeded toward Mary's wagon home, but, to our surprise, it was not in its usual position.

We found the missing wagon standing outside the circle.

The driver, a sulky, sullen fellow, I had never liked, stood close by it, in earnest conversation with a dark, heavily-bearded man, who had joined the train a few days before.

Both men hastily withdrew on our approach, but not until I had demanded of the driver an explanation of the changed position of the wagon, and received a mumbling reply, to the effect that it would be more sheltered from the cool night winds.

"The horses were unharnessed before I knew it," said Mr. Scott, my dear one's father.

A soft good-night to Mary, a lingering pressure of the hand, and then, making my way to my own wagon, I crept in, and lay down to sleep at the side of my trusty dog, Rover.

I was aroused by a violent shake from a hand grasping my shoulder.

The hand belonged to Mary's father.

"Harry! Harry! Rouse up!—rouse up!"

"Mary!" I gasped, for there was something in the wild looks of the man before me that caused me to fear something had happened to my sweetheart.

"Mary! Ay! She has been abducted. But come! We will talk as we saddle the horses!"

I tarried only long enough to snatch up my cap and pistols, and then hurried after my friend.

"I was awakened," he said, "by feeling something cast over my head. I was bound hand and foot. There were two men—I knew their voices—one was our driver's, and, Harry, the other was John Barton's. I saw him, too. He was the man who joined the train a few days ago. That heavy beard was a disguise. They left me lying there helpless, and crept to the other end of the wagon, where the partition hid them from my sight; but, oh, Harry, I heard Mary's half-stifled shriek!

I heard them lift her to the ground, and heard the horses moving away cautiously in the darkness. And I lay there till the trainmaster came to rouse me up. They have taken our best wagon horses, but though they have hours the start, we'll overhaul them!"

"Thank Heaven!" I exclaimed, "that we have two such good horses, and such a trusty dog!"

Five minutes more and we galloped away from the camp.

On and on we galloped, and Rover galloped on before.

Through the hot sultry day we sped on until, just as the sun was sinking, our faithful guide halted, and for the first time that day barked, and came rushing toward us, and laid at our feet a woman's (Mary's) glove.

I snatched up the precious token, and pressing it to my lips, felt a paper rustle inside.

In a second I held a little penciled note in my trembling hand.

It read:

"Father—Harry—John Barton has not forgotten his oath. I know you will follow closely, so I keep up my courage. I write this hidden behind the horses, which are lying down exhausted, while Barton and our treacherous driver are digging a hole to get water for them. I shall place this in my glove, feeling sure that Rover will find it. Have no fear for me. If there is need, my poniard will defend me; but you will find me before that."

Looking up, we saw that Rover and our poor foam-flecked horses had found the hole dug by the fugitives.

It must have cost them at least three hours' hard work, without implements as they were, and that was so much clear gain for us—a gain of time, and a gain of water, without which our own sturdy animals could not have pushed on much longer.

We allowed them to crop the short grass for half an hour.

Scarce was the half hour passed when we were thundering over the prairies again.

Suddenly, as we entered upon a long, narrow gulch, closed in by overhanging rocks on either side, Rover came to an abrupt halt, and, crouching low, beat the ground furiously with his great bushy tail.

As quickly we drew rein—so quickly indeed, that the sudden halt brought my companion's weary horse to his haunches, and then making a fruitless effort to recover himself, the poor animal rolled over on his side, and lay there, panting and helpless, while his master, with difficulty, succeeded in freeing himself from the stirrups.

And still faithful Rover crouched on the ground, his eyes flashing, but not a sound did he utter; and so, knowing the dog as I did, my heart leaped at the knowledge that he had at last "run his prey to earth."

With a whispered caution to Mr. Scott to follow softly on foot, and to keep Rover back, I rode quietly on, keeping a sharp watch for the group I felt sure were very near at hand.

Suddenly, out of the midst of the deep silence of the night, sounded the voice I loved so dearly, raised, not in fear, but in stern warning and menace.

The ground was soft, and my gallant Fleetfoot's hoofs fell noiselessly on the turf; and so it was, that turning a sharp corner, I came at once upon a group totally unaware of my approach—Mary standing erect and unflinching, John Barton recoiling before her upraised poniard.

"Villain!—scoundrel!" I shouted. "Defend yourself!"

My finger was on the trigger of my pistol, but he was quicker than I, and, even as I spoke, a bullet whistled through my cap.

The sound of Barton's pistol seemed to rouse my horse to sudden fury. He made one leap to Barton's side, and then, rearing, struck at him with his forelegs.

There was a fierce, half-stifled oath, a dull, crushing sound, and John Barton lay prone on the ground, dead.

I leaped to the ground and clasped my beloved one in my arms, safe and uninjured.

So full of thankfulness was my heart that I did not regret our treacherous driver had escaped unharmed, as I supposed.

But when Mary's father joined us he told a different tale. "The fellow was in such a hurry to escape you," said he, "that he nearly rode over me before he saw me at all; then he fired a hasty shot, and I returned the compliment, and saw his left arm drop helpless at his side. So he has a broken arm as payment for his rascality."

We dug a grave in the lonely valley, and laid therein the erring man whose evil passions had wrought his doom.

After three days of moderate riding we rejoined our comrades of the emigrant train, amidst cheers and expressions of delight.

AN ANGEL OF MERCY GAVE WARNING

About twelve years ago Mrs. George Sherman, living with her husband on a farm in western Kansas, was left with her little boy, four or five years of age, and a half-breed Indian, known as Jack, while her husband paid a business visit to Ellsworth, thirty-five miles away. Jack had been with the family two years, and though at times morose and sulky, he had always proved faithful.

Sherman visited Ellsworth to get a large sum of money sent on from the East by a brother, for whom he was to invest it. The subject had, of course, been talked over between him and his wife, but neither of them had the least idea that Jack suspected the nature of the errand.

Mrs. Sherman could use firearms and ride horseback, and was a brave-hearted, self-reliant woman. She had a navy revolver for her protection, though, as a matter of fact, she would have smiled at the idea of any danger coming to her. The country was clear of lawless characters, two or three savage dogs were at hand to take care of strangers, and Jack could be depended on with his carbine in case of necessity.

Sherman went away on horseback. It would take him the best part of a day to reach Ellsworth, as he had to make a stop en route. He would be detained there a day, and would reach home, leaving as he did on Monday morning, on Wednesday morning. This was based on the calculation that he would leave Ellsworth on Tuesday night and ride all night. It was in the latter part of June, with beautiful weather and good roads.

Nothing out of the usual routine occurred until Tuesday night. That is, Mrs. Sherman observed nothing to rouse her suspicions, although she afterward recalled several strange incidents. For instance, the husband had not been gone an hour when one of the dogs howled in the most dismal manner, and when the half-breed sought to quiet it the animal showed his teeth and seemed revengeful.

It was remembered, too, that Jack appeared independent and defiant, and when the wife gave him orders he took his own time about obeying them. He slept in the stables, and one of the dogs generally kept near him; but when night came on the first day both canines were determined to sleep in the farmhouse, and both were admitted. It was the same on the next night.

On Monday night the brutes seemed to hear some one walking about outside, but Mrs. Sherman gave the matter little thought, believing the noise to have been occasioned by a loose horse.

On Tuesday night she went to bed at nine o'clock, having seen that everything was secure, and she had scarcely dozed off before she began dreaming. The dream began with the arrival of a letter from the East that the money was coming. It was in the evening, and husband and wife talked the matter over as they sat near an open window. This was just what did occur in reality, but in her dream Mrs. Sherman saw the half-breed crouched down under the window outside to listen. She saw him creep away in the darkness, and realized that he was in possession of the secret. She dreamed that her husband rode away to Ellsworth, just as he had done, and that after he had gone a vicious-looking half-breed, with a scar on his left cheek, came to the stables in the night and had a long talk with Jack. She could not hear what they said, but their looks

and actions indicated evil. By and by they left the stables, and she saw that Jack had his carbine and the other a revolver. They went down the road toward Ellsworth, about two miles, and halted at a ford. This was a lonesome spot, being in a dip, with wild plum trees growing thickly on each side of the road.

Then the dream changed, and she saw her husband come riding up. She knew that the men were hiding to waylay him, and she tried to motion or shout to warn him. Her voice would not come, and she hadn't the strength to lift her hand. As her husband crossed the creek the two men sprang out and fired at him, and she saw him fall to the ground and the frightened horse dash away. The scream she uttered banished sleep in an instant, and as she found herself wide awake one of the dogs uttered a long-drawn howl.

It was only three-quarters of an hour since the woman had got into bed. The dream had been so vivid, and the impression so strong, that she at once dressed herself, determined to investigate at least the point from which it started. Leaving her child asleep in bed, and taking the revolver in hand, she softly left the house and proceeded to the stables. She reached them to hear the low voices of men in conversation, and as she put her eye to a crevice she saw that Jack had a companion. They were cleaning and loading their firearms by the light of a candle, and the stranger was marked on the cheek as the woman had dreamed.

It was well that she had the heart of a brave man. Had she betrayed herself by any act of womanly weakness, her death would have followed.

She retreated as quietly as she had come, and when again in the house she tried to think what should be done. If her husband left Ellsworth at, say, seven o'clock, he would be home by two in the morning—by three at the latest. She need not make any new move for two or three hours yet.

Fortunately for the woman, the little boy was in robust health, and a sound sleeper. She equipped herself for a night walk, and then turned out the light and sat in the darkness. Both dogs came and lay at her feet, but at intervals were nervous and uneasy. Their wonderful powers of scent must have warned them that some stranger was about the place.

At midnight Mrs. Sherman attached a rope to the collar of either dog and passed out of the house, locking the door behind her. She walked down the road about a mile and then made a detour across the prairie, and struck the creek half a mile below the ford. The water was waist high, and very cold, but she was soon across.

She struck the highway half a mile from the ford, and walked on, but had not gone above a mile when she encountered her husband. In a few minutes he was in possession of her story, and he was not long deciding on a plan of action. His wife mounted the horse, and he led it, until they approached the creek. He then left her, called to the dogs, and went forward to uncover the would-be assassins.

The dogs were furious for the hunt, and they had not been gone from his side five minutes before they found and fiercely attacked the half-breed. Three or four shots were fired, and then came calls for help.

Sherman advanced, to find Jack on the ground, badly wounded, and one of the dogs guarding him. The strange man had taken to flight, hotly pursued by the other dog. This dog did not return for two hours, and then his chops were red with blood, but it was never definitely known whether his victim escaped or was pulled down.

The sudden attack of the dogs confused the men in hiding, and a shot meant for one of the brutes struck Jack in the chest. Knowing that he had only a short time to live, he confessed that the pair had planned to waylay and rob Sherman, and had they been successful in this they would have afterward carried the woman away with them. He died in the thicket within half an hour, having been told how it came about that the plot was discovered, and saying, in answer to the explanations:

"Surely there must be a God, and He sent an angel to give warning."

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